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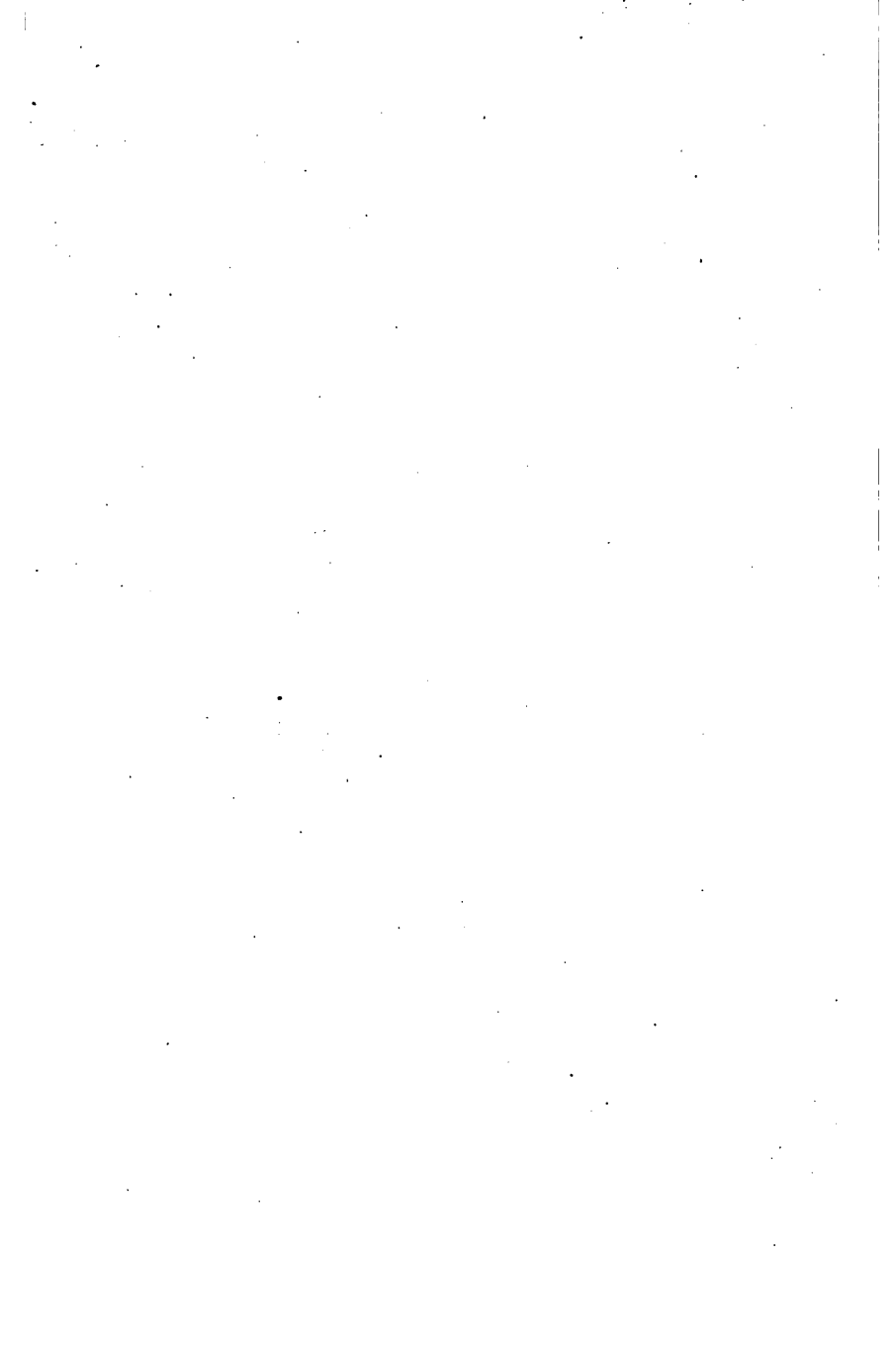
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# AFFINITIES

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# AFFINITIES

**A Romance of To-day**

BY

**MRS CAMPBELL PRAED**

**AUTHOR OF 'ZERO' 'POLICY AND PASSION' ETC.**

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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# AFFINITIES.

## CHAPTER XII.

RAINSHAW hesitated a moment and eyed the sick man doubtfully, as though it had occurred to him that frankness might be better policy than evasion.

‘Look here, old fellow,’ he said. ‘If you have ever had any idea of Judith Fountain, you had much better put it all out of your head. I told you so the first night you asked me about her. Molly and I, between us, will engage to find you as pretty and as charming a wife as you could desire, and with money into the bargain.’

‘I don’t want a wife, thank you; and I have money enough of my own. But I’ve got a particular reason for wishing to know whether there’s anything between Mr. Colquhoun and Miss Fountain. If you don’t tell me now, you will force me to come downstairs a little sooner than is prudent—that is all.’

‘It has something to do with that dream of yours! You know it was all imagination; the fever was upon you then.’

‘Very probably,’ said Graysett; ‘but you don’t answer my question.’

‘I don’t want you to be worried and thrown back,’ objected Rainshaw. ‘Of course Lady Romer would like to secure Judith’s fortune for her friend; and of course Colquhoun would be only too ready to grab it; and if he gains an influence over her, no one has any right to interfere. I don’t see why they should. There’s nothing really against him.’

‘ You had a different opinion a little while ago.’

‘ I swam with the tide—that’s all. When the papers say that a man is a knave you believe them, though, practically speaking, it ought to be the other way on. I think Colquhoun may be a fool about business matters, but I won’t call him a knave. He had rascally partners; and Margrave was quite right, a poet should stick to his own line of life, whether it be writing sonnets or making love to pretty women.’

‘ He has, then, gained an influence over Miss Fountain?’ said Graysett.

‘ There’s a great deal more going on under the surface than I care to investigate,’ replied Rainshaw oracularly. ‘ I have no opinion upon the subject. I know nothing about it.’

‘ At all events, Miss Fountain, being a connection of your wife’s, is entitled to some

regard from you. Her happiness cannot be a matter of complete indifference to you.'

'I did not imply that. It is simply that I am outside the whole affair; and nothing that I could say or do would alter the course of events. A woman cannot do better than marry the man she loves, unless he be an unmitigated ruffian, and I am not justified in supposing that Esmé Colquhoun's motives are unworthy of a gentleman. I don't suppose anything. If Miss Fountain is in love with Colquhoun she will marry him, and I hope she may be happy; I don't care whether he is so or not. He may run his own risks, and so must she. As a matter of fact, your happiness is of much more importance to me than hers.'

'Oh, leave me out of the question,' said Graysett with the irritability of weakness. 'If there we reany risk for her, why did you invite him to stay on?'

‘I didn’t do so. It was my wife who asked him. We have got two Australians here whom we are bound to entertain. They want to study the different features of English society. Esmé Colquhoun is decidedly a feature. They were particularly anxious to meet him, and so we have earned their eternal gratitude. That is the history of it. As for Lady Romer’s scheme, it is not my business to make or mar it. I am distinctly neutral. I wash my hands of it all. Candidly, I shall not be sorry when Molly is tired of the set, but I can’t prevent her knowing who she likes, provided they are respectable. I don’t care about the sort of element they have introduced into the house. There’s no fun in seeing people make fools of themselves, after a certain point; at least I don’t think so. Thought-reading and mesmerism and hanky-panky generally are a bore. Mrs. Borlase was wise to take herself off just then.

I give her credit for being a sensible woman. However, she is coming back to-morrow.'

Graysett moved uneasily, and frowned, as he uttered an exclamation expressive of resolution.

'What is it?' asked Rainshaw.

'You don't give me any idea of what has been going on. I must judge for myself.'

'When?'

'This evening, if possible.'

'No, indeed,' cried Rainshaw; 'who goes softly, goes surely. Here you are for the first time out of bed, and you talk of coming downstairs among a party of strangers! You are looking much better, and we shall have you round in a very short time now; but you must not be impatient. Besides, it would be of no use this evening. We are all going to a function at Holmborough; some charitable amateur performance, in which Esmé Colqu-

houn has promised to distinguish himself. Molly sent a message to ask, if she might come and see you to-morrow. She is a much better hand at social gossip than I am. But she is apt to colour rather highly; don't take all she says for gospel. There is really nothing to tell, except that Colquhoun seems to find pleasure in devoting himself to Miss Fountain, and that she appears equally pleased to accept his devotion.'

'I shall be delighted to see Mrs. Rainshaw,' exclaimed Graysett. 'Pray beg her to come.'

'And bring Judith Fountain with her! I am afraid that would not quite do. Don't worry about it, old fellow; consign the whole business to the limbo of "might-have-beens" — Judith, Esmé, the dream, and all your wild fancies. They were the shadows of your illness.'

Rainshaw departed—to Graysett's relief; for his tactless sympathy was like the unskilful probing of a painful wound. His vague allusions to mysterious proceedings were sorely disquieting. Graysett determined, contrary to all advice, that he would join the general circle upon the morrow, then groaned and chafed, when, upon testing his strength, he discovered how greatly taxed it had been by the excitement of his late interview. He paced the room for a minute or two with the eagerness of a caged animal, but presently sank back upon his sofa as helpless as a baby.

Judith's little bouquet lay upon the pillow. A thought struck him. He would write to her. He went back to bed, and fortified himself with the restorative food which was brought to him. Propped up by pillows, he began his letter. It was a long one, and in it, he poured out his whole heart, beseeching Judith to send him a



word or line which should confirm, or allay, his fears, and thus put an end to the suspense he was enduring. He gave it to the manservant who attended him, desiring that it might be at once taken to Miss Fountain. He then tried to compose himself and recruit his forces for the morrow. He did not expect an answer that evening. It was now late in the day, and he knew that dinner must be earlier on account of the performance at Holmborough. Faint sounds reached him as he lay nervously listening. He could hear the muffled beat of the gong, and some time afterwards the indistinct roll of carriages. About nine o'clock a note was brought him. He had never before seen Judith's handwriting, which was upright and peculiar, and he found himself stupidly arguing from it, ere he opened the letter, that a woman who gave this evidence of strength of character would not readily yield herself to the influence

of another, and would at least reflect before committing herself irrevocably.

The letter had neither formal beginning nor ending.

‘I don’t know why you should care for me so strongly and suddenly, but if your affection be as unselfish as you describe it, you should be glad if I can find the conditions of life upon which it has always seemed to me that I must base my hope of becoming human.

‘You may smile at my fantastic notion, that I am not an ordinary woman with instincts, sympathies, religious beliefs like the girls, wives, and mothers around me, but an abstraction, a partly irresponsible creature, a sort of Undine, incomplete till the force of an irresistible affinity shall draw my being into that of another who will supply the element I need for the perfect development of my faculties. Smile.

But my intuition tells me that this is so. It tells me that when I comply with the law of affinity, I comply with the highest law of my being, let the consequences be what they may.'

This letter, with its ambiguously-worded phrases, which suggested so much and conveyed so little, intensified Graysett's fever of anxiety. Its indifference to his own feelings seemed to him deliberate cruelty. He was ready to acquiesce in her judgment of herself. She was an abstraction without human sympathies.

He was worse the next day and almost unfit to rise. Circumstances contributed to postpone Mrs. Rainshaw's visit, but he insisted that it should take place; and late in the afternoon he dressed and prepared to receive her in the little sitting-room which adjoined his bedroom.

## CHAPTER XIII.

HE was lying on the sofa, looking very pale, and feeling dazed and shaky, when his hostess entered. She, with her fashionable draperies, her exuberant health, her brilliant smiles and frank sympathy, was like a fresh breeze from outside, at first almost overpowering ; but the presence of a young, pretty, and kind-hearted woman is seldom too oppressive, even if she be wanting in delicate discrimination. He felt sure that she would, in her impulsive babbling, reveal all that he desired to know without embarrassing questioning upon his part ; and, strange to say, felt more at ease with her than with her husband. His welcome was as cordial as could have been desired.

She halted as she approached his couch, and the tears came into her eyes as though she had been a child.

‘Good gracious!’ she exclaimed. ‘I am so sorry! What a ghost you look! But you’ll soon be better,’ she added, with a sudden consciousness that the first duty of a visitor to a sick room is to be cheerful. ‘You *are* better than I expected. Good gracious!’ And she sat down in an arm-chair beside the sofa, and looked at him in a very womanly way. ‘Tell me what I’m to do? Tom said I was to amuse you. But do you like me to talk? Will it tire you? You must let me know exactly what you like, and when I am to go away.’

‘I want you to tell me all about everything, Mrs. Rainshaw, in your own charming way; and if I shut my eyes and don’t speak much, please don’t think I am not enjoying it. It’s

the greatest treat to me to hear the news of the house, and all that you have been doing, without the exertion of asking for it. Tom isn't much of a hand at description.'

'How heartless you must have thought us, going on in just the same way as if you hadn't been ill!' said she with compunction. 'But we all thought of you more than I can say; and I am furious with Stiggins. He used to be rather a friend of mine; but I told Tom that we'd have nothing more to do with him. It was a great comfort, however, that there was no serious injury—and jungle fever is a thing that will keep coming and going—isn't it? You must not ever go back to India again. I thought you looked very ill the night you arrived, and Tom told me of an odd sort of vision you had which seemed to upset you. That was the beginning of everything. Oh, Major Graysett! and you were getting on so

nicely too ! I had such hopes. Why did you fall ill ? ’

The tears started again to Mrs. Rainshaw’s eyes. She looked extremely discomposed, and there was an air of suppressed anxiety and importance about her, as though she had some big piece of intelligence weighing upon her mind.

‘ Why indeed ! ’ he answered. ‘ You can’t be more sorry than I am myself, that I have caused you so much trouble and worry. ’

‘ Oh, that’s nothing ! It wasn’t *that* I meant. ’ She drew a little table near her and began to arrange some hothouse flowers she had brought.

‘ You mustn’t talk. I am going to sit here and tell you some news ; but I won’t give you too much at once, lest I should excite you. Now, first of all, have you been comfortable ? ’

‘I could not have been more so—that is, under the circumstances.’

‘I am going to move you at once. You shall have my morning room. At any rate, it is more cheerful than this. Isn’t it an odd little room? I think that, in the old days, it must have been a hiding-place, or an oratory, or something mysterious.’

‘Please don’t have me moved,’ said Graysett. ‘I like it. And tell me, for nothing reaches me here, has anything important taken place?’

‘A great deal that is important—to some people,’ said Mrs. Rainshaw enigmatically. ‘I am disappointed. I am perplexed. I don’t think that it would have happened if you had been downstairs,’ she went on incoherently. ‘I liked you very much, Major Graysett, from the moment I saw you in the hall. I felt sure you were the sort of person a girl might trust.



Now one may like some people and yet not have that feeling.'

'Indeed I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion. I hope that I deserve it. At all events, I think that you may trust me. But this—is it anything very terrible?' He tried to speak lightly, but his voice trembled.

Mrs. Rainshaw paused in her occupation, and looked at him half questioningly, half sympathetically, from above a cluster of stephanotis.

'Do you know,' she said, 'that when you were ill and were not conscious of what you said, you talked a great deal of Judith Fountain? Don't be angry with me,' she added quickly, seeing that a flush rose to his pale cheek. 'Tom told me. I hope you don't think that it was mentioned, or that anyone talked. No one thinks anything of what people say in fevers. I don't suppose the

nurse noticed it at all. It was of no consequence.'

Graysett's eyes met those of Mrs. Rainshaw straightly.

'I supposed that I had been talking nonsense,' he said coolly. 'As you say, it does not matter. I was only with Miss Fountain for a day or two, but even during that short time I got to know her, and to feel deeply interested in her. I can guess what perplexes you. Mr. Esmé Colquhoun has shown himself greatly attracted by her.'

'Ah! it is more than that!' exclaimed Mrs. Rainshaw, dropping her flowers. 'I don't know why I should beat about the bush. She herself told me to tell you. She is going to marry him.'

The blow had been expected, nevertheless it came upon him like a shock, and for the moment made him feel dazed and giddy. In

spite of his weakness, however, he had sufficient self-control to utter no sound of dismay, and presently the beaten-down feeling passed, and a sort of despairing excitement took its place. He had an impulse to rise there and then, and to rush into Judith's presence and implore her to pause and consider in what she was involving herself. He did not think of his own disappointment; his solicitude was solely for her.

‘I must get up,’ he said. ‘I must speak to her. It must be stopped.’

‘Ah!’ said Mrs. Rainshaw, ‘that will be impossible. She is infatuated. Nothing would turn her from him. Not that I think we have any right to try, Major Graysett—if she loves him. I know that there are people who think very highly of Esmé Colquhoun. Why should we suspect him of being a fortune-hunter? He might have married a rich woman before

now, if he had chosen. I must say that I don't think he would be a comfortable sort of husband. But Judith is peculiar; and if she loves him——'

'Do you doubt it?' asked Graysett, quietly.

'Judith could not fall in love like anyone else. I think she is bewitched. I have an uncanny feeling that she is in a dream, and will wake up by-and-by. She is so quiet. She has no little ways or airs; and yet you can see that she neither hears nor heeds anyone but Esmé. The truth is, Major Graysett, I am trying to argue myself into a comfortable frame of mind—but, somehow, I can't.'

'Mrs. Rainshaw,' cried Graysett, 'you have your cousin's welfare at heart?'

'I like Judith. But she has always been far away from me—I mean in mind. It

doesn't seem as though *I* could influence her. She is not my cousin. She is only a distant connection on my mother's side. I feel for her. I wanted to have her staying here a good deal, only Tom doesn't care about her. I feel for every girl who has money, and whom people want to marry, when I think of how they persecuted me! There was an Italian count who followed me everywhere. He always took his seat opposite me at the *table d'hôte*, and when there happened to be an epergne between us, had it removed. He pestered me. He pestered my mother. I am sure we were quite grateful to Tom for delivering me. You see Judith might have done really badly. It might have been an Italian count. There is nothing against Esmé Colquhoun.'

'There is everything !' exclaimed Graysett, with emphasis.

‘What do you know?’ asked Mrs. Rainshaw, looking at him in an alarmed manner. ‘Has he murdered anyone—out of a book? *That’s* not a punishable crime. Has he got another wife? What do you mean? If you know anything you ought to tell her plainly. But it would be of no use. Have you any reason for speaking so strongly?’

Graysett hesitated. ‘He has not murdered anyone that I am aware of. I dare say that his moral character is quite as unimpeachable as that of any other man of the world. If I were to tell you the true reason for my prejudice against him, you would laugh at me for being superstitious. I don’t mean to tell you—there would be no use in it. I know less of Esmé Colquhoun than you do, but I have the most intense conviction—it amounts to a certainty—that his fascination for this poor girl is evil and unnatural, and

that if he marries her, there will be a terrible fatality.'

Mrs. Rainshaw uttered a little cry. 'I wish you would tell me what you mean. Since you don't *know* anything, there does not seem much sense in jumping to such dreadful conclusions. Are you one of these occult people, Major Graysett? I don't go in for that sort of thing. I don't like it. I think we have had enough of it here. Has your idea anything to do with your dream? Won't you speak to Judith yourself? I think she would listen to you.'

'Yes, I will speak to her.'

'She is going away to-morrow—she and Mr. Colquhoun, and Mrs. Borlase. I don't know how you will make an opportunity.'

'I am coming down to-night,' said Graysett, with determination. 'You will be kind to me, and will let me sit quietly in a corner of the

drawing-room, and you will help me all you can—will you not?’

‘Of course I will;’ and with the frankness of a child she stretched out her hand and laid it upon the pillow beside him. ‘I am so sorry for you. You’ll forget about it—won’t you? It couldn’t have gone so very far—in three days.’

‘We won’t talk about that, Mrs. Rainshaw,’ he said; ‘though I am grateful to you for your sympathy. It is of her that I am thinking, not of myself. You’ll do me the favour, I am sure, not to allude to that again, as far as I am concerned. Now please be still kind, and tell me how it came about. A fortnight does not seem long for everything to be settled in, though perhaps I ought not to say so.’

‘Oh, it has been going on much longer—with her at least,’ replied Mrs. Rainshaw. ‘She told me, in her odd, mysterious way, that the



first time she ever spoke to him she knew he was the only man in the world who could make her feel. I don't think, however, even granting that he is in love with her now, that he ever thought of marrying her till they met at Holmborough. It's a very clever achievement. Judith is not a girl to fall in love readily; and she is quite aware of her value. He is rather played out as a celebrity. People are getting tired of him, and the papers have been writing him down. It was quite necessary that he should take a new departure of some sort—cut his hair, grow a beard, or marry Sarah Bernhardt. Major Graysett, did you ever hear of anyone being mesmerised into love?'

'Did he mesmerise her?' asked Graysett faintly.

'Something like it. I will tell you. We were in the Long Gallery one afternoon. I

think it was the day after your accident. Judith had been playing to us. We were all in rather low spirits, and, by way of making us more cheerful, Lady Romer started a conversation upon occult subjects, and told us the most ghastly story of a vampire that you ever heard. I hope you won't hear it—at any rate till you are stronger—and mind, if you do, that you don't go to sleep on it. Then Esmé Colquhoun struck in. His story was in a more poetic strain, but was quite as creepy. He described a moral vampire; a human being with the power of absorbing into his own system all the vitality and will-force of anyone peculiarly susceptible to magnetic influence, till the poor creature lost all individuality, and became a mere shell, galvanised into obedience by the will of its destroyer. Isn't it a horrible notion? I dream of it; and a weird impression has taken hold of me that Esmé Colquhoun is just such a

monster, and that he has selected Judith for his victim. Haven't you ever remarked what strength of will he has? You can't look at him without feeling it. I have heard Christine Borlase say that he might do anything if only he had tenacity of purpose. But that is the way with poets. They are all flesh and inspiration, and no bone or muscle—in a figurative sense, you understand. Esmé went on to tell us that he had been studying the philosophy of some queer sect in America, who did all kinds of wonders, and taught him how to concentrate and exercise what he calls his “odic force”—whatever that may mean. He gave us a lecture on the subject, using a great many long words which I can't profess to understand or repeat: but the gist of it all was, that WILL, when concentrated and directed, is an actual force—a motive power—isn't that the expression? like steam, or electricity, only vastly

superior to both, a sort of Vril—you have read “The Coming Race,” I suppose—and that you may remove mountains with it, animate matter, or perform any other miracle you might like to imagine. It is simply a question of having enough of it. . . . So someone suggested that the experiment should be tried at once; and as there was no professional medium present, and as we could not, at this elementary stage of development, expect to make the solid oak cut capers, it was proposed that Esmé should try and put some life into the nearest approach to inanimate matter among us—Judith in one of her dreams. Well, Major Graysett, I hope that I shall never assist at such an uncanny sort of exhibition again. He made no passes—only looked at her intently. She did not drop down or go to sleep, as I have seen people do when mesmerised, but stood quite still and rigid, with eyes wide open like

a somnambulist, answering all the questions he asked her quite mechanically. They were simple test questions about different things we had agreed to think of; and every time her reply was perfectly correct. Afterwards he bandaged her eyes; and she followed him about as though he had been a magnet, doing everything which he willed. I believe that she would have thrown herself from the window if he had desired it. He made her sit down to a table, put a pencil in her hand, and bade her write. The pencil moved like wild-fire, and in a few minutes he showed us a little poem—an Oriental love-song full of imagery and passion, not at all like anything I have read, and certainly not in Judith's style. . . . But a very curious thing happened. While she was in this state of trance, he led her to Christine Borlase and joined their hands, he holding her left hand and Judith's right, so as

to form a circle. Judith awoke with a shriek, and then dropped down right away. It was a long time before we could bring her to her senses.'

'What did she say? What explanation did she give?' asked Graysett eagerly. He had been hanging upon every word Mrs. Rainshaw uttered with the most intense interest.

'She was as white as death, and at first did not seem able to speak coherently. She seemed utterly bewildered. Then she looked at Esmé and said rather wildly, "What have you done to me? I have been in pain. There have been two creatures in me. They hurt each other," or something to that effect; it sounded great nonsense. She kept looking round with the strangest expression in her eyes. Have you ever taken chloroform?'

'Yes.'

'When I asked her afterwards how she

had felt before going off, she said the sensation was like that, and would say no more, except that she had been quite unconscious all the time, till a sharp sudden pain awoke her.'

'But Colquhoun?'

'He made a very pretty apology, declaring that he would die rather than injure her, and begging her to remember that she had given him full permission to try his power upon her in any way that he pleased. He said that he had never been so completely successful, and that he had not realised its extent. He said, too, that the experiment had been a revelation to him of natural laws, which he had suspected but had never been able to bring into operation. I can't remember all he told us; it was most extraordinary. He looked intensely excited. I had never seen his eyes quite unclosed before. You don't know what curious eyes

they are. There's a little ring of light round the pupil and they glow like fire. I began to feel frightened. I begged him to bottle up his "odic force," at all events while he remained in this house, or, if he must exercise it, to do so on chairs and tables. I call it most uncomfortable. It's as bad as dynamite—if at any moment you can be reduced to a state of spiritual nothingness in that way. Tom was very angry with me when I told him all that had happened. He said I should have stopped it. How could *I* stop it? "Odic force" isn't to be stopped once it's set going. It is too serious a thing to tamper with. I took Judith away and put her to bed. That seemed the most sensible thing I could do. She went from one shivering fit into another; and so I sent for the doctor. He said that she had had a shock to the nervous system, and gave her some morphia. She slept all night



and all through the next day. Esmé Colquhoun was deeply distressed. He wanted us to telegraph to London for Maudsley or some other great brain doctor. Tom was still more angry, and declared that he wouldn't have his house turned into a lunatic asylum. I had to remind him that it was my house, and that he was unreasonable. Then Judith awoke and seemed all right again. At any rate, she came downstairs, and everything went on as usual, except that we did not try any more of those games, and agreed that, on the whole, it was better to drop the subject—especially as a new set of people had just arrived. Oh, Major Graysett, you must see them ! They'll amuse you ; they are quite out of the common ; they are Australians. He was something in one of the governments out there, and used to drive about with gold nuggets on his harness. Just think ! But she has found out that sort of

thing is not in good taste. She is very pretty, and would like to be started as a professional beauty, but doesn't know how to set about it. I think the Admiral might do it for her. They are looking round to see what they had best take back to Australia in the shape of European ideas, and they've come to the conclusion that a little æstheticism would counteract the utilitarian tendencies out there. Imagine their delight at finding themselves in the same house with Esmé Colquhoun! In the interests of civilisation I had to ask him to stay on; and so for the last ten days they have been drinking in wisdom and art.'

The nurse entered with some broth and medicine, and gently intimated that her patient might be getting wearied by this brilliant chatter. Mrs. Rainshaw rose full of self-reproach when her attention was directed to Graysett's wan face.

‘No, no!’ he exclaimed; ‘your soft voice doesn’t tire me. You babble on like a brook; it’s pleasant to listen to. But it is not these Australians who interest me, though I dare say they are very amusing.’

‘Ah!’ she cried naïvely; ‘another polite reminder that I am in the habit of making excursions from my subject. I know that I am rather difficult to follow; but life is quite as mixed as my talk. Poor Judith! I don’t know why I pity her, for she assures me that she is happy. She has been a great deal with Esmé Colquhoun. I must say that he has behaved beautifully to her before people—with a kind of chivalrous deference which one can’t help admiring. I don’t know what they talk about when they are alone. If he finds her as silent and preoccupied as she appears to be in general company, he has not had a lively time; but I don’t suppose that is likely. She

has not been living in the world at all. She has no thoughts except for him. I don't want you to fancy that she has allowed this to be too apparent. Judith could never, under any circumstances, be undignified. I think it is what I have got into my imagination—that he is a kind of vampire, and has absorbed her being into his own.'

'When was it finally settled?' inquired Graysett.

'Yesterday, I fancy.' She came to me not long ago with the news. She spoke of you, and begged me to tell you the story, if I could do so naturally and without exciting you. They are to be married before the spring—oh! I know what you are going to urge; but, indeed, it is of no use. If anyone has influence, it is yourself. She is a strange girl—so cold! It seems impossible to touch her except through her own sensations. I never

knew her concerned about anyone's illness before ; but she really seemed full of consideration for you.'

'I have no chance of seeing her unless I go down this evening?'

'She leaves us early to-morrow. Don't run any risks, Major Graysett, I beseech you. I will bring her to you.'

He shook his head. 'I want to judge for myself how things are between them. I'll go down this evening, Mrs. Rainshaw. I shall feel stronger after resting a while ; and you'll excuse me from appearing at dinner, and won't coddle me too much afterwards.'

'Everything shall be as you choose. I wish that I could really do something to help you,' she said with simple kindness. 'I am grieved that all this should have come upon you under our roof. We have done very badly by you.'

## CHAPTER XIV.

GRAYSETT was sustained by the strength born of excitement and resolve.

When the ladies re-entered the drawing-room after dinner he was there, looking rather like the ghost of himself, but insisting upon not being treated as an invalid.

Mrs. Rainshaw displayed considerable tact in so arranging her guests that he was spared introductions to new people, and was not bored by the congratulations and ministrations of those he knew. She carried off the strangers, among whom were the pretty Australian and some other later arrivals, to the end of the long drawing-room, and left Major Graysett surrounded by the old set—Lady Romer, Miss Geneste, &c.—which was presently joined by

Judith Fountain and Mrs. Borlase, who entered together somewhat behind the rest.

Judith had evidently not expected to see him. A sudden flush overspread her pale face, mounting to her brow and dying away as quickly as it had come. His heart leaped as he beheld this sign of embarrassment, and he had hardly voice to return Mrs. Borlase's greeting. The artist was the first of the two to take his hand and murmur some words of sympathy. Judith hung back. But in a minute she too approached him, and said in a mechanical voice, as though she were repeating a lesson she had learned—

‘I am very glad that you are better. I have asked for you every day. I hope that you always got my message.’

He thanked her, saying that his chief reason for making an appearance that evening, was that he might be able to bid her good-bye, as

he had heard that she was leaving Leesholm the next day.

‘Yes,’ she answered with another quick flush, ‘I am going to London to-morrow. I’m glad you came down this evening.’

She moved away. He fancied that she feared he would ask her some difficult question. She turned upon him a pathetic glance, and seated herself at some little distance from him. He determined to bide his time.

He was not sure at first whether she had indeed changed, or whether his imagination, quickened by what he had heard, discerned in her face signs of a new and intense consciousness. He thought of the hackneyed simile of Galatea awakening to life. There was a look in her eyes which he felt might have been in the eyes of Galatea. After he had watched her for a little while, he decided that she had greatly changed.



She seemed more human. Following her own fantastic suggestion, he noted how the influence had worked. She was less cold, less self-absorbed. Her sudden blushes followed by transparent paleness, the tremor of her lips, a shy hesitation in her manner, a startled expression, neither alarm, wonder, nor dawning passion, yet blending all three, a sort of expectancy in her gaze—all these were to him deeply significant. If she were in a dream, it was not a wholly untroubled one. She did not look happy. She was no longer a fearless investigator of abstract problems, whom no emotion could seize with any strong hold, and who was serene, cynical, or simply apathetic as outward circumstances dictated. Life had become momentous to her. A chord had been struck in her being which must vibrate for evermore.

Such fancies, and many others, grim, bizarre, dreary, passed through his mind while

he watched her. Then, as the sound of voices in the hall announced that the gentlemen had left the dining-room, for an instant her face seemed to grow into the likeness of that tragic, despairing face of his vision, and the same sensation of clammy horror overcame him and renewed his superstitious terrors.

She was leaning with her elbow upon a table, one thin little hand shading her brow. He saw the hand drop and clutch the other nervously as the door opened. There came into her eyes a perplexed, rapt look as though she had received an invisible summons. She smiled when Esmé Colquhoun approached her, a smile which had in it more of pathos than of joy. Drawing a deep breath, she sank back in her chair with face upturned, and a gesture, very timid, scarcely observable, but which seemed to imply the most utter self-surrender.

Graysett sighed heavily from the depths of

the large arm-chair in which he had placed himself. The sigh was echoed close to him, in a weary, hopeless, despondent sound, rising as it were involuntarily from the heart of her who breathed it. So absorbed had he been in his reflections that he was hardly conscious of the proximity of another person. People had drifted, perhaps with kindly intention, to the farther end of the room, and it had appeared to him that he was alone. Turning slightly, he saw Christine Borlase sitting not far from his chair. Her eyes were fixed upon Judith and Esmé. She was apparently as deeply interested in the two as he himself. He had received an impression at the ball, when he had intercepted her glance in their direction, that there was something tragic in her attitude towards them ; and the impression was strengthened at this moment. He became convinced that she also loved Colquhoun ; and he wondered vaguely

that she had given him up so readily. He forgot for a second that she was a married woman. In her case the fact was not self-evident. When he realised the position, suggestions occurred to him not reconcilable with the frank nobility of Christine's countenance. For an instant only her manner might mislead, her face never. She was perhaps an unhappy, a misguided, an embittered woman, but under no circumstances, he felt sure, could she be an actively disloyal one.

Becoming aware of his scrutiny, she moved and was about to address him ; but just then, Mrs. Rainshaw, unquiet till Graysett had found the opportunity he sought, fluttered towards them. In her wake followed the Admiral, a lean, atrabilious, un-sailorlike gentleman, with, nevertheless, a decided air of fashion and distinction, who had requested an introduction to Mrs. Borlase, and was incidentally made known to Major Graysett also. The four moved to-

wards the fireplace, where had gathered the larger circle, of which Esmé Colquhoun was now the centre.

He stood in front of the mantelpiece, towering above all the others, his head thrown back, his hair gleaming in the shaded light of a lamp placed upon the velvet-draped board, while he stirred his coffee and added his voice to a discussion of the tendencies of modern fiction, and the legitimacy, from the artistic point of view, of turning the story-book into a pathological dissecting-room. The question had arisen *à propos* of a new novel which had grated upon the moral susceptibilities of the critics, and which Mrs. Bearfield, the pretty Australian, was doubtful whether to condemn or admire. She had, so far, compromised matters by elevating and lowering her fan, and exclaiming, 'Oh, fie!' at the mention of the book, and was now gazing up at Colquhoun in an attitude that dis-

played the liberal contours of a remarkably white bust. She was ready to adopt his opinion as soon as he should be disposed to declare it explicitly, and was certainly sufficiently handsome and quite daring enough in her dress to deserve his attention.

‘Oh, she’ll never do; she’ll never do,’ murmured the Admiral in the tone of a connoisseur to whom has been submitted an article of *bric-à-brac* which is palpably an imitation. ‘She hasn’t the courage of her ignorance. If she would but be natural, and perhaps talk a little colonial slang, she might succeed; but that’s where they all make the mistake. It’s only the American who is clever enough to grasp the situation. This one hadn’t sense enough to come out in the white frock and straw hat she used to wear in her garden at Geelong, and pose as the innocent barbarian. With that rose-leaf complexion she might have carried

everything before her. But she tries to be modern and civilised, and European, and is as much out of place as Mrs. John Wood would be in refined tragedy. That pink satin dress with the black tarantulas sprawling over it gives me the creeps. She over-dresses. It's the way with the Australians; they have not learned yet how to put their clothes on. . . . Mrs. Rainshaw, we don't require Esmé Colquhoun to tell us that the age is corrupt. Surely we can see that for ourselves.'

Colquhoun was rolling forth his sonorous sentences. He had taken up the cudgels on behalf of the writer in question, and was defending the school of Gautier and Baudelaire, with which he identified himself.

'What,' he was saying, 'is our mission—we writers—but to distil the essence of the Age? The critics tell us that we are complex, that we are psychological, that we are corrupt,

that we are anatomists of diseased minds. We reply: The Age is complex; the Age is corrupt; and the Society we depict is the outcome of influences which have been gathering through centuries of advancing civilisation. The men and women of the world have been refined from field flowers to exotics; the simple conditions of Nature are not for them. The social atmosphere must be adapted to their organisations, as we regulate the air of our hothouses. There is no room for Nature in London. She is too glaring, too crude, and London is essentially the pulse of civilisation. Every man and woman I meet is a psychological problem. How has the Spirit of the Time influenced him or her? How will he or she affect me? You are morbid and introspective, say the critics. I grant it. Life is morbid. The reign of healthy melodrama is over: the reign of analysis has commenced.



We make dramas of our sensations, not of our actions. Emotion has become a fine art which the artist must practise if he aim at fidelity to his creed. Life is for him a many-sided prism, in every facet of which he sees the reflection of a different phase of his own being. He lives, to feel. He feels, to reproduce; and when he has reproduced, he closes the door upon his experience. The past is shut out, and the world is the richer. He has been dowered by the gods with forgetfulness. He moves on—to receive again, and again to give forth.'

Colquhoun poured into his coffee the tiny glass of cognac, which had been standing at his elbow, and sipped it thoughtfully. There was something both fascinating and repellent in his intense egotism and his shallow heartlessness. As he put down the cup, his eyes darting across the room met those of Christine Borlase, who looked at him full.

‘You remind me,’ said she, ‘of that story of Talma, who when he listened to the death-shriek of the being he had loved best, could only ejaculate, “Mon Dieu, quel cri pour le théâtre!”’

‘Ah!’ said Colquhoun, ‘you underrate the sincerity of the artist. He has two souls, that which feels and that which observes; consequently two processes are simultaneously at work within him—the emotional and the analytical. He is an egotist—admitted. But if he were not a sublime egotist, he could not be a sublime artist.’

Mrs. Bearfield, who looked puzzled and somewhat dissatisfied, broke in, in so artless a manner, that the Admiral softly clapped his hands—

‘I’m afraid then that we are quite out of it in Australia, Mr. Colquhoun, and that you’ll never find the necessary artistic conditions

among us. We are all Nature. We are dreadfully glaring. I don't see how we're to help it.'

'Ah, do you know,' said Colquhoun, smiling upon her with languid magnanimity, 'to me there are but two terms, civilisation and barbarism? Conventionalism is the worst form of barbarism. You will strike your own keynote, and evolve harmonies in sympathy with your dazzling noonday. I am a poet of night—the night of city and *salon*—luxuriously illuminated, full of passionate sweetness, suffused with the voluptuous odour of perfumes. But for you, I am mute—an Australian Walt Whitman may perhaps lift you to a higher level than mine. At least you will not have to contend against the debasing influence of the Mediævalists—the influence I am fighting. I confess that Nature is not my inspiration. Only once has simplicity seemed to me a thing beautiful in itself; that was when I

went to see the greatest American poet. I mounted to the top of a high house. The room was little more than a garret; the windows were wide open; the place was bathed in sunlight; the walls were bare; there was a chair; there was a great earthen vessel full of clear water; there was a table, and on the table writing materials, and three great books, Homer, Shakespeare and Dante; and I said when I beheld the poet, "I am in the presence of a greater man than myself."

'Insufferable conceit!' murmured the Admiral. 'At least it would be insufferable, if it were not for its simplicity.'

Colquhoun had quitted his position and approached his hostess.

'Are we not to have any music this evening, Mrs. Rainshaw?'

'I think all that sounded very improper,' said she; 'the first part at least—the end was

lovely and quite bracing. Yes, Mrs. Borlase will sing for us ; ' and the artist was borne off to the piano.

She sang a little French song, tender and sparkling, full of coquetry, yet with an undertone of sadness resembling the tears that laughter hides. The singer urges her undeclared lover to wed a certain rich woman ; setting forth all the cogent reasons for the step, playfully ignoring his affection, yet all the time suggesting the possibility of its return on her part. At the end of each verse the refrain runs with melancholy archness, and the faintest little shrug and raising of the eyebrows :

Mais—ça ne me fait rien,  
C'est tout pour votre bien ;

while at the last stanza, there is a most pathetic change to the familiar *tu* and *toi* :

Mais—ça ne me fait rien,  
C'est tout pour *ton* bien.

## CHAPTER XV.

IN the slight confusion which followed the song Major Graysett found an opportunity to accost Judith unheard.

‘Come to the recess yonder,’ he said, in tones half imploring, half imperative. ‘I beseech you to let me say a few words to you alone. I may not be able to speak to you again, since you are leaving to-morrow.’

She rose without question, and they went together to that alcove where they had conversed upon a former occasion. She seated herself upon one of the divans partly screened from observation by a tall and bushy palm, but started up again when she perceived his extreme paleness. He felt weak and faint

from standing, and sank into a chair by her side, leaning back against the cushions, and at first almost unable to speak.

‘Oh, you are ill!’ she exclaimed. ‘You ought not to be here. May I not get you something—water—or wine—or call someone to you? It would be better if you did not try to speak to me to-night.’

‘I must speak. No, don’t leave me. I am quite well—quite well enough. I stood a little too long—that is all.’

She sat down again with her hands folded before her.

‘You know,’ he began, ‘all that has been in my mind since the first evening I met you. I felt that it was my mission to try and save you from an influence which I had been warned would work you evil. Think what torture it has been to me to lie like a log, while you were exposed to the deadliest peril. Oh,

don't think that I care about myself! It isn't so—it is all for you. My letter must have told you that.'

'I thank you for your letter,' she said simply. 'I did not know how to answer it. I am afraid I could not feel as you wished or expected. What was it you expected?'

'I need not explain myself,' he answered, with a little bitterness. 'The letter was too late; it did not touch you.'

'You could have done nothing,' she said abruptly, after a brief pause.

'Perhaps not. At least, I might have watched you; and indirectly might have tried to shield you. Had I been present, that scene in the Long Gallery would not have taken place.'

'Ah!' She drew a long breath. 'You know about that. I did not know how much Mrs. Rainshaw had told you. I wanted her to



tell you everything, but I did not like to ask her outright. It was very strange. Other people have made passes over me, and have failed. He did nothing; he only looked at me.'

'It was what you had imagined?—the experience?'

'No. I used to think that if I could be put into a mesmeric trance a new world would be opened to me, and that I should become clairvoyant. This was so I presume; but I seemed to see nothing. I was not conscious of any revelation.' She stopped and asked, 'Did Mrs. Rainshaw tell you about the writing? Do you suppose that his brain was working through me?'

'I suppose that would be the scientific explanation, if the term can be used in connection with such phenomena.'

'It was not the least in his style; it was

like nothing I could have imagined. It was very curious. Spiritualists would declare that it was inspired by some dead person : but that theory is to me absolutely abhorrent. It is vulgar ; it is degrading. I can believe in unknown forces ; I can believe in occult laws ; but I can't believe that wandering souls are at our beck and call, or we at theirs. . . . I knew nothing,' she went on rather brokenly. 'There was at first a dreamy feeling of far-awayness, and lightness—a sort of ecstasy. I can't describe it ; and then the shock and intense pain of becoming myself again. I have never felt any pain like it. Do they not say in the Bible that a certain man was rent sore when the dumb spirit departed out of him ?'

'It was an evil spirit, and this man's influence over you is evil. Has not such an experience been sufficient to make you shrink with horror from submitting yourself to it ?'

‘I don’t know,’ she replied dreamily. ‘It is not a matter of choice.’

‘Do you mean that you are in a state of bondage,’ cried Graysett, ‘and that you cannot free yourself?’

‘I might struggle—but I don’t think that it would be of any use,’ said Judith. ‘I don’t know why I should struggle!’

‘Because,’ he said sternly, ‘it is degrading to a pure woman to be in the power of a bad man.’

‘You must not speak against him,’ she said simply. ‘I love him. I am going to marry him.’

‘And I,’ he exclaimed, ‘do *I* not love *you*?’

‘Ah!’ she cried, and her accent smote him like a knife, it was so nearly joyous. ‘It is too late for that : it was always too late. You were not strong enough. You remember what

I told you? It needed someone very strong. He has done what I wanted. He has made me feel.'

'He has done more,' said Graysett bitterly; 'he has made you cruel.'

'I am very sorry for you,' she said after a moment's pause, speaking slowly. 'I did not mean to hurt you. I was ready to yield myself to the power if you had possessed it, but that was not so. You know what I said—that some day there would come one who should fill me with life. He has come. I could not wish for more than to fulfil the law of my being.'

'Are you not afraid?'

She shook her head.

'It is stronger than fear. Do not think that I have not thought of your warning. At first it found an echo here'—she touched her breast; 'but that's gone. And the faculty I had of

seeing what is false and artificial in him is gone too. He has absorbed me into himself.'

'That can hardly be an enviable fate, if the nature with which you identify your own be base.'

'Then I am base. I do not say that my fate is enviable. I do not think of it in that light. My tendencies and my affinities are my fate. Flame will to flame, and water to water. If his soul be bad and impure, then mine is so also, or it would not be attracted towards him. Why do you speak ill of him, and insinuate bad things?' she added almost fiercely. 'You know nothing to his discredit.'

'I know nothing. But you believe in intuition. I have the most terrible forebodings. Are you certain that he loves you?'

'Oh, if he does not,' she exclaimed, 'I don't wish to know it. It would kill me.'

‘Judith,’ said Graysett gravely, ‘shall I tell you what it is that I fear for you?’

She bowed her head and listened without speaking, though every now and then he waited, as if expecting some comment upon his words.

‘I have been thinking deeply about you and him—about all these things—during my illness, more especially the last day or two. I can’t reason about my intuitions, which may or may not be flashes from a higher intelligence. . . . I don’t believe that there are spirits which can, at the instigation of a human being, enter in and take possession of our souls. But I think, as you do, that a magnetic atmosphere emanates from all of us, and that some have a stronger power of attraction or repulsion than others. Is it not so?’

‘Yes. I can tell when I enter a room whether the magnetism of the people who live in it is congenial to me, or the reverse.’

‘It is this force which heals many diseases, and may give health and vigour to the weak. But there are persons whose magnetism might be noxious to subjects of a peculiar mental bias ; while their fascination would be as that of the serpent over the helpless bird.’

She uttered a little cry and started to her feet.

‘If there were such a thing as moral poison, it might, by frequent contact with the infected person, be conveyed to one who was pure. There is this terrible possibility, but I do not fear it for you.’

‘This is wrong ! This is wicked !’ she cried ; ‘you have no right to say such things—no reason.’

‘I have no reason, I admit ; and I have no right, none—I know that—except my deep, pure love for you. And do you know how deep, how pure it is ? Do you know how

strong is my conviction? I would save you from Esmé Colquhoun at the price of never seeing you more.'

She sat down again, and gazed at him with wide, startled eyes.

'If you do not fear that of which you speak, what is it that you fear?'

'You have a most sensitive and delicate organisation. You are, I am certain, peculiarly susceptible to magnetic influences. Your body is frail. Your nerves are highly strung. Our mental and physical systems are so closely united, that a shock to the one may completely disturb the balance of the other. I think that you received such a shock when you placed yourself under the power of Mr. Colquhoun's magnetism; and that if he continues to exercise it, your vital force may be slowly sapped, your reason perhaps impaired.'

'My reason impaired!' she repeated in so



startled a tone, that he, remembering suddenly what Rainshaw had told him of her family history, regretted bitterly the words he had used, and felt a pang, so keen, that for a moment he was unnerved. She leaned forward and put her hand to her forehead, with her brows puckered, as though he had aroused some painful, slumbering consciousness. She seemed to be thinking deeply. At last, she sighed in the half-resigned, half-relieved manner of one who recognises the inevitable. Then she rose again as if wishing to terminate the interview, and laughed, in that gentle light way which was a fashion with her, and which seemed at once to hide and to reveal so much.

‘Indeed, Major Graysett, you set a pleasant prospect before me—death or madness, with the alternative of separating myself from the man I love. You have been very eloquent. Ah, you have developed your belief in the

occult very much since the first night we talked. You have advanced even further than I. All these terrible predictions are founded upon—an intuition! Intuition is a great and wonderful faculty; it was I who laid stress upon that; but, to avoid argument and to spare us both needless agitation, I am begging the question and taking refuge in the materialist camp—in this case, I prefer reason.'

Her words seemed a dismissal. Standing close to her, he poured forth a torrent of passionate, incoherent entreaty. She listened in silence. When he paused, she said, with a break in her voice—

'Thank you; thank you; you are good and sincere. I feel sure of that; I would trust you above all men. I wish that it could have been otherwise, and that I had not hurt you so much. Forgive me. I must obey what is so strong in me. You cannot hold me

back ; nothing can do that. Do not, I beg of you, try to see me again till after my marriage—till I bid you come to me. Your magnetism,' and she smiled softly, 'has for me the colder, purer attraction of friendship. I may need it some day, and I promise you that, if that day comes, I will send for you. Till then—good-bye !'

She stretched out her hand to him, and let it linger in his clasp.

'What is your name ?' she asked suddenly.

'Edward,' he replied mechanically.

'Good-bye, Edward—my friend ! I will bid you come when I need you. If you wish to do me good, will that I may have peaceful nights, and that my soul may be once more bathed and warmed in that heavenly sea I told you of. I cannot reach it now.'

There was something inexpressibly mournful in her manner of pronouncing the last

words; her eyes were large and wet with tears. A sort of triumph thrilled him. He also had made her feel. Oh, for the 'might have been!' She turned away. He watched her glide across the room, and saw Colquhoun advance and place himself by her side.

A strange dizziness overpowered him. The sound of voices and music, the lights, the fashionably dressed figures, the room in its homely luxuriousness, struck upon his senses with mocking unreality. He could scarcely determine whether the scene, the conversation with Judith, the striking form of Colquhoun, the torture of his mystic previsions, were not all a dream. Was there, then, side by side with the objective world, one of spirit and idea—the causes there, becoming the effects here? Had he stepped upon the threshold and from thence caught shadowy glimpses of the operations of these causes? His very love

for Judith—so spiritual, so swift and mysterious—seemed to have had its origin in those unknown regions. The common things of life appeared to him, at such a moment as this, but empty shells, and those things which were hidden and transcendental seemed to him the actualities of existence. In this confusion of his being, due perhaps to sickness or to latent delirium, to reason was an impossibility. He was like a man possessed by a monomania, and with no guiding light but the lurid flashes of a disordered imagination.

## CHAPTER XVI.

As soon as he had sufficiently recovered from his illness to travel, Graysett left Leesholm, and by the advice of a London physician spent the spring months on the Riviera.

The fever and his mental suffering, disproportionate though this seemed to the short-lived hopes of which the disappointment had caused it, left traces which could never be obliterated. A great change had come over him. He was not the same man who had landed in England a few weeks before. His whole organisation had received a shock. His nerves were shattered ; his views of life utterly depressed. A crowd of morbid symptoms beset him, and they in their turn reacted upon

his physical frame. He shunned society, and shrank from sport and the pursuits in which he had once delighted. His thoughts glided in fantastic circles, and, forsaking rational subjects, dwelt upon the mysterious, the horrible ; while all the while he was conscious of a certain disturbance of his intellectual balance, and would try to turn his mind into a healthy channel, only to wander back into the former groove. At these times, he would begin to entertain vague fears as to his sanity, and to speculate upon the possible result to an excitable brain of a long residence in a tropical climate, and of the blood-poisoning incident to malarious fevers. A celebrated nerve doctor whom he consulted took this view of his case, and glibly mapped out his summer, prescribing Gastein and the Engadine, cheerful companionship, a dietary regimen, and wholesome concrete interests.

But while hinting at abnormal fancies and at his bondage to one persistently recurring idea, Graysett had found it impossible to confide to a physician the curious psychological experience he had undergone, or to describe accurately his mental condition and the terrible fears which preyed upon him. During night and day he was perpetually haunted by his mystic vision of Judith and Colquhoun which, more vivid than the most realistic painting, thrust itself between him and the objects towards which his eyes were bent. The possession was at one time so complete that, with a reactionary impulse, he tried to account for it materially and to combat it by the force of will. In a measure he succeeded. Change of scene and the gradual restoration of his strength lightened the burden; yet though reason might compel the phantom to retreat into the background, he knew that it was always close to



him, and that in hours of darkness or depression it invariably returned to his side.

The Rainshaws did not join him on the Riviera, as had been at one time suggested, but they kept him posted in all English news which they imagined would be of interest to him. Mrs. Rainshaw gave him an elaborate description of the wedding of Judith and Colquhoun, which took place two months after the announcement of the engagement, hurried on with diplomatic though hardly seemly haste. It would, however, have been difficult for him, even had he wished, to escape the buzz of comment which preceded and followed the event. The newspapers aired it freely, and the British and American communities of Cannes and Nice seemed to regard it as a sort of apotheosis of the poet, who, whatever his claims to substantial fame, had certainly succeeded as an unmarried Apostle of the Beautiful in creat-

ing a sensation. His admirers prophesied that under purer and more favourable conditions of development his genius would soar to heights it had never yet attained. His detractors considered it advisable to commend the policy of a man who at the critical time of his career had been clever enough to secure the affection of a beautiful woman and the command of half a million of money. Exaggerated reports were circulated about Judith's infatuation—if indeed it could be exaggerated—and of the magnificent humility with which Esmé announced his determination of living up to the ideal standard she had framed for him, and in accordance with his own sublimest conceptions of moral beauty. An article of his in one of the magazines, in which he exhaustively analysed concentrated love as opposed to diffused love, was credited with a personal application; and a tiny volume of sonnets published at this time, glorifying

spiritual passion and allegorising wedlock in the most pure and elevated phrases, was supposed to have been inspired by his rapturous yearnings after sweet domestic life. It was a peculiarity of Esmé's chameleon-like nature that, given a dramatic situation, he could regulate at will the quality and the intensity of his emotions. Judith's ethereal beauty and absolute dependence upon his will, as well as a certain scientific pleasure which he found in awakening in her new sensations and in watching their effect, were sufficient to create a fervid impulse which exhausted itself in song. He threw off the bundle of leaflets at white heat, in the first days of their engagement ; it was dedicated to her, beautifully bound in white vellum, and might be seen in most fashionable drawing-rooms, where it did much towards creating for him new sympathies. It was a fresh departure. It seemed that he had carried his philosophy

of the Beautiful from the objective to the subjective field, and was demonstrating the soul of æstheticism, as distinguished from its material manifestation in the shape of furniture and hangings, peculiar modes of hairdressing, velvet suits, knee-breeches, yellow brocade and peacock's feathers.

This was the season of private views in studios, artistic parties, and social excitements of the minor kind. The great world was out of London, and politicians were resting. The journals, from mere dearth of matter, revived an old theme with a new blare of trumpets. People were interested in reading of the wonderful and artistic fabrics, out of which the poet was designing costumes for his bride's trousseau ; and the suggestions that Judith was 'occult,' that Esmé, by the exercise of will-force, was possessed of a mysterious power of fascination, set the imaginations of a great many

emotional wonder-seekers at work. These were delighted to scent a vague connection between the school of æstheticism and that of a tiny community of esoteric philosophers, just then the centre of one sphere of spiritual activity in London, and who in their turn professed to reconcile all existing schools, and to bridge over the gulf between protoplasm and disembodied spirit.

Esmé encouraged the impression by mysterious references to hidden agencies. So also did Lady Romer and her fellow-disciples in supernatural investigation, whose *répertoire* of facts, theories, and phrases was vast enough to embrace, impartially, the Esoteric Doctrine of Christianity, the revelations of the Mahatmas of Thibet, the disintegration and reintegration of matter, the phenomena of spiritualism, the flight of astral bodies, psychological telegraphy, the miracles of Lourdes, the feats

of Mr. Irving Bishop, Platonic affinities, 'occult diet;' and so on indefinitely. A new dispensation, in short, heralded, as of old, by prophets who dreamed dreams and saw visions.

The critics sneered, the wits made epigrams, the scientists reflected caustically upon the gullibility of mankind, the social moralists emptied phials of dignified contempt, but the sensationalists were in the ascendant, and Esmé Colquhoun, gathering all currents, as it were, into himself, and gaining strength from each, was, by force of an irrepressible individuality, more than ever—Esmé Colquhoun.

Immediately after the marriage, he sailed with his bride for America. Reports of their brilliant reception dribbled through the papers, and paragraphs dilating upon Judith's beauty and ethereality, upon her wealth, and upon the devotion of the young pair to each other, with details of their dress, their personal habits and

private life generally, were now and then copied into 'Galignani,' or some English society journal. Mrs. Rainshaw, when at the end of the summer she met Major Graysett in the Engadine, called his attention to one of these paragraphs.

'I am afraid that one ought not to place much reliance upon such reports,' she said ; 'but I can't help feeling some satisfaction when I read them. It looks, at all events, as though Judith had got what she wanted ; or that, if he can't give it to her, she has not yet found out the fact.'

Another event, which occurred about the time of Judith's marriage to Colquhoun, made an impression upon Graysett, and caused him often to wonder whether, if it had happened two months sooner, the union would have taken place. This was the sudden death of Mr. Borlase. Christine was telegraphed for the

very day before that fixed for the wedding. She set off at once for the foreign town where her husband was consul, and arrived in time to see him expire.

She was now free. Too frank and too completely a Bohemian to affect a grief she did not feel, the fact made no radical difference in her mode of life. She devoted herself with even greater ardour to her work, and after the first six months of her widowhood resumed, in part, her former habits, enjoying the company of a few intimate friends, and mixing again with the fellow-artists who sought her studio.

She passed the winter in Rome, studying assiduously. There, she painted a picture, which afterwards, when it was exhibited in the Academy, brought her much renown. She was cheerful, and her excellent health increased her capacity for physical enjoyment. She gave her energies wide scope, and allowed herself no time for sorrow or regret. She was a



brave woman, and, young though she was, had become hardened to the realities of life, while she possessed a singular independence of character. She had never loved any man but Esmé Colquhoun, and she loved her art perhaps even more than she cared for him. She, too, possessed in a measure the artist's power of rebound. The part she had taken in bringing about Esmé's marriage had been passive rather than active, and she would not let herself consider whether what had been done was well or ill. The woman who stands alone, fenced in by an enthusiasm for some abstract pursuit, has a vantage ground denied to her weak and idle sisters. To such an one, life can never seem utterly barren. A sustaining interest must spring up from the grave of a dead passion, and the buried heart may send forth a rose to be the wonder and admiration of the world.

## CHAPTER XVII.

It was June. Everyone was in London. The Rainshaws had taken a house in Eaton Place. Esmé Colquhoun and his wife had come back from America. The Romers were in town. Mrs. Borlase had returned from Rome, and her Thursday evening receptions were in full swing.

Little more than a year had passed since she had lost her husband. She made, however, no pretence of mourning, and went out as before. She wore black, but her velvets and brocades, cut as was her style, after an old picture and trimmed with deep Flemish or Italian lace, did not suggest the idea of widowhood. By this time most people, except

those who had peculiar and personal reasons for remembering the fact, had forgotten that poor old Stephen Borlase, British Consul at —, who had not been ‘artistic,’ was dead, and that Christine was free.

She lived in one of those quaint detached houses in West Kensington, that are to be found, surrounded by meaner dwellings, in streets of which the name is hardly known, and which seem particularly affected by members of the literary and artistic professions.

It was a long way for the votaries of fashion to drive; but they came nevertheless in flocks; and on one especial Thursday evening the string of carriages, longer and wider than usual, almost blocked up the narrow thoroughfare.

Mrs. Borlase’s ‘At Homes’ were called ‘small and early.’ As a matter of fact, they were only early in the sense that people came

as soon as they liked, and that cigarettes were permitted after twelve; and they were never small.

One by one, guests descended and entered at the open door; then, delivering their wraps into the hands of a smiling little French maid who waited in the anteroom, found their own way through the conservatory, and down the flight of wooden steps leading to the studio.

This was a large room painted in dull Venetian red, with a high-pitched roof and gallery which afforded a vantage ground for studying the amusing scene below; and it was as picturesque as it could be rendered by Indian stuffs, harmonious hangings, Japanese screens and umbrellas, quaint pottery, carved cabinets, paintings on easels in all stages of development, and 'properties' generally, professional and bizarre.

But it was too crowded to-night for such

accessories to be of much consequence. The human element held itself supreme; and the buzz of talk was almost deafening. All sorts of people were present. There were tired-looking Belgravian dowagers, fashionable beauties, and eccentrically dressed æsthetes. There were a celebrated tragic actress, the queen of refined comedy, and a bevy of minor theatrical stars, representatives from the musical world, amateur and professional artists, and ordinary humdrum people. There were men with decorations, society men, and men who never went anywhere but here; *littérateurs*, scientists, art patrons, Academicians and long-haired composers; common-place men with pretty wives, and common-place wives with distinguished husbands; here and there, a bright-eyed foreigner or dreamy German enthusiast, while every now and then, a word or two of French or Italian rose above the low roar of

sound. Mrs. Borlase reconciled all nationalities and all diversities of interest.

Now there was a sudden lull as a composer, whose music everyone loved to hear, seated himself at the piano, and his small frame, bent almost double over the keyboard, sent forth the most sweet and thrilling harmonies. Then presently a charming foreign singer, whom he had accompanied a little while before, and who was standing close to him, would ask, 'Do you know this?' humming a snatch of some unfamiliar air; and he would take up the melody and improvise variations upon it—grotesque, fantastic, melancholy and jocund, glancing eagerly round every now and then, as if seeking sympathy, and almost forgetting where he was till murmurs of 'Bravo, bravo!' would remind him of his audience.

There was singing after this, and the very best; none but professionals performed at Mrs.

Borlase's Thursdays, and they did for her what they never did except among their own set. When it was over, the flutter of drapery and murmur of talk recommenced.

Little scraps of conversation reached Graysett's ear, as the crowd in the gallery hemmed him in more closely—banal and frivolous enough, yet amusing to one not in the swing of such gossip—and he listened as he might have done to the by-play on the boards of a theatre.

‘ . . . Do you care for De Rivaz's singing? You should hear Miss Geneste take him off—eyes, and languishing airs—it's delicious. Mrs. ——,’ naming an actress noted for her unflattering candour, ‘said to him the other night, “I admire your voice, De Rivaz; but I don't like the way you roll your brandy balls about.” He was so angry.’

‘Will she do for the Fancy Fair?’ indicating Miss Geneste.

‘No,’ decidedly. ‘She is not famous enough; she is only going to be. She does the most perfect imitation of Sarah Bernhardt you ever saw. But budding celebrities won’t suit your purpose. Wait a year or two till they have blossomed.’

Graysett leaned over the railings and tried to follow with his eyes the movements of the people he knew. He saw but few of his acquaintances. The Rainshaws were there, but too far off to be approachable. Several others of the Leesholm set were present: the Australian belle very *décolletée*, talking to a used-up-looking gentleman with an eyeglass; the Admiral, making sinister observations to himself; Sir Frederick Romer, apparently in the last stage of boredom, blocking up a doorway. Seeking for Lady Romer, Graysett perceived her, posing now after the statuesque model, with classically braided tresses and flowing draperies, seated upon a couch at the upper end



of the room beside one of the strangest and most striking-looking women he had ever seen.

This lady was certainly not English, but to what nationality she belonged it would have been difficult to guess. Her appearance carried speculation beyond the bounds of Europe. She might have been either of Asiatic or American origin, for in her physiognomy there was a sort of combination of the Oriental type and that of the American Indian. Either suggestion offered a wide margin for possibilities.

She might have been sixty, but looked younger. Her features were decisively yet delicately cut, and full of individuality. The fine nostrils dilating easily, and the sensitive lips giving a character of alertness to her face, which was contradicted by the full Eastern-looking eyes. These were extraordinarily large, luminous, and dreamy. They seemed to draw the light into themselves, like a jewel of which

the depths appear unfathomable. There was nothing shifting or unsteady in their gaze, though they were capable of a variety of expressions. They were almost too inscrutable, too determined, to be absolutely beautiful. They compelled awe rather than admiration, or indeed any human feeling. The whole countenance, if somewhat wanting in feminine sweetness, was noble and mysteriously attractive. Its strangeness was perhaps partly due to the vivid contrasts of colouring it presented. The eyes were so dark, the skin so rich an olive, the lips so red, and the eyebrows and lashes so black; while the hair, of which there seemed an immense quantity, was white and crisp like snow.

She wore a kind of headdress of white lace carelessly knotted round her throat. But here beauty and stateliness ended. The figure, covered by a robe of lustrous white satin,

fitting loosely and veiled in lace, was shrunken and deformed, the shoulders rising almost to the level of the ears, while the pigmy stature was in painful disproportion to the grandeur of the head. This, Graysett had an opportunity of remarking fully as she stood up for a minute or two, apparently that she might view through the high studio window the effect of some Japanese illuminations in the garden. He could not help feeling how singularly pathetic was the want of harmony between the misshapen body and the soul which looked out of those wonderful eyes. Presently she sat down again. She had evidently attracted notice, for a number of people pushed their way towards her ; and two or three, gathering round her, drew her into animated conversation. Her manner and gesticulations were distinctly foreign, and partly contradicted the impression of dignity which her face gave when

in repose. Her form swayed. She waved about her thin flexible hands, and her eyes seemed to grow larger and to dart forth lightning as she talked, apparently with great rapidity, and, to judge by the play of her own features and the aspect of her listeners, upon a subject more than commonly interesting. Graysett, absorbed in speculating as to its nature, started at the sound of his name, pronounced in the neutral tones of Mr. Margrave, one of his fellow-guests at Leesholm.

‘How are you? Mrs. Rainshaw spied you and gave me a roving commission to bring you to her at a convenient opportunity. But it is impossible to move in such a crush; there are more people than usual here to-night.’

‘Mrs. Borlase appears very popular,’ said Graysett.

‘Oh, that is of course. But there are two

attractions this evening : the Esmé Colquhouns and the New Hypatia.'

'Are the Colquhouns here?' asked Graysett abruptly.

'They are expected. I don't think they have arrived yet ; Esmé is always late. Have you read his new book?'

'No.'

'People are making a great fuss over it. I think that I prefer his more carnal style. Air-drawn abstractions are incomprehensible to my material nature. I am trying to cultivate spirituality to keep in pace with the times ; but it is beyond me. I have not seen the Colquhouns since they came back from America. I hear that she is greatly altered.'

'How?' exclaimed Graysett eagerly. 'For the better or the worse?'

'The worse, I fear. She was always a little odd, you know. I fancy all this occult

business has been too much for her ; it generally affects people's heads in the long run, as I tell Lady Romer, if they take it seriously. Don't you think so ? '

' I don't know anything about it,' replied Graysett.

' Nor I, for the matter of that ; but I am a bit of a social philosopher ; so, I imagine, are you. Has it ever struck you what a queer process of fermentation must be going on under the surface in an assemblage like this ? One can't help wondering what fresh sort of spiritual gas is being generated. I see that you are interested in the New Hypatia ? '

' Do you mean the lady in white beside Lady Romer ? Yes, I have been watching her for some time. Who is she, and where does she come from ? '

' Her name is Madame Tamvaco. What country she hails from, and how long she has

lived, is a mystery. I dare say there are people who will swear that she has been traced back to the Magians, and that she has found the Philosopher's Stone and quaffed the Elixir of Life. There are, at any rate, some credulous individuals who solemnly believe that she is in the habit of getting out of her body, and of making aërial journeys to Asia, where, though in what particular locality it is not stated, she holds grave council with Eastern sages. That these conclaves affect the destinies of the human race goes without saying. I should be grateful if Madame Tamvaco would instruct me how to get out of my body when I am bored or have a fit of the gout. I don't know that I should go to Asia, though it's a wide place and might offer an agreeable variety to English life.'

'So Madame Tamvaco is a spiritualist?'

said Graysett.

'A spiritualist!' repeated Mr. Margrave.

‘If I introduce you to the Sibyl, don’t insult her by telling her that she is one. The New Pythagoreans—that is what they call themselves—hold the vulgar phenomena of spiritualism in supreme contempt. They have phenomena of their own by the way—a species of Indian jugglery which bases itself upon strictly scientific principles. The word “supernatural” is not in their dictionary. They produce what we call miracles by manipulating the secret forces of Nature, and their high priestess claims to be initiated in the esoteric knowledge of the old philosophers, which has always mocked us like a will-o’-the-wisp, and which, granting that it exists, does not promise us any practical result.’

‘I have read something of the doctrine of these people,’ said Graysett, ‘and was deeply interested. It has often seemed strange to me that we have not more seriously investigated



the profound truths which manifestly lie at the root of the Esoteric philosophies—those of Pythagoras and Plato for instance, which are built upon the old systems of the East.’

‘Oh!’ said Margrave. ‘It all comes to the same thing. That which is, was from the beginning, and there is no new thing under the sun. I suppose that we are all of us—all, that is, who think—searching after a religion, and happy should we be if we could find one that would satisfy alike our reason and our aspirations. I will say for this new, or old, scheme of cosmogony, that it is extensive enough to embrace all the geological and astronomical facts which puzzle the theologians—so vast that even the Creator of our universe is lost in it and becomes a mere secondary cause.’

Graysett smiled. ‘You begin as a scoffer, you end as a sage.’

‘It’s the question of soul apart from the

digestive apparatus which interests me,' said Mr. Margrave in his serio-comic manner. 'I have never been able to dissociate the two in my own case, and when I heard that these New Pythagoreans professed to do so, I thought that I should like to hear how they managed it. So I went to a *conversazione* they gave really in the spirit of an earnest inquirer, and prepared to listen with great attention to all that Madame Tamvaco had to tell me. All London crowded there likewise—a few seriously inclined like myself—the most part in search of a sensation. They expected to hear astral bells ringing, and to see flowers raining down from the ceiling. I must frankly admit that I also had a lurking hope that something miraculous would happen. Nothing did happen. There were no phenomena. There was not even any startling denunciation of existing creeds. The "Brotherhood of Humanity;"

the "Evolution of the Race;" the "Higher Life." These are stock phrases. "Self-sacrifice, purity, truth. We have heard of such things before; and when the noble example of the Prophet of Nazareth was set before us, and He was incidentally described as an Initiate in those ancient mysteries of which Madame Tamvaco and Co. claim the key, I felt inclined to cry out, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?"'

Graysett laughed thoughtfully.

'It's a strange world!' he said. 'I should have liked to hear that lecture.'

'I dare say that you would have remarked, as did an advanced young woman in my hearing, "Why, it's nothing but Christianity, after all: and this is the nineteenth century! We did not come here in evening dress for this!" The whole produced a moral effect upon me. I sought out Madame Tamvaco the next day,

and asked her why she had not warned me that she was a Christian. There was plenty of denunciation then ; but it was of ecclesiasticism, not of Christ's teaching. I came away impressed and inclined to agree with her, that since not one of us in ten millions can hope to become a perfectly developed being short of a long series of incarnations, we had better dis-establish the Church, go straight to the Bible, and start another Reformation for ourselves. Come with me on Saturday, I'll introduce you to the Sibyl. She will give you an uncanny feeling, at first, that her eyes and ears are seeing and hearing what you cannot see or hear, but that will wear off after a bit.'

They made their way down from the gallery. Mrs. Borlase, at the foot of the steps, was playfully coaxing a French tenor to sing. She was leading him off in triumph to the piano, when she saw Mr. Margrave and stopped

to offer him a cigarette from a silver casket she carried.

‘See the perfect hostess!’ he said. ‘But your crowd hasn’t begun to thin yet, it’s waiting for the lions. I went out into the garden, as you desired, and saw lots of lanterns but no love.’

‘I did not guarantee the love: I said that there was a garden and that there were lamps. You were to find the love.’

‘Failing that, I am going to find wisdom. Major Graysett wished to be introduced to Madame Tamvaco.’

‘After this song,’ said she. ‘Wait a minute. Major Graysett, this is the first time you have been inside my studio. Do you remember my asking you to give an opinion on Miss Fountain’s portrait. There it is, still unfinished. . . . And here,’ she added after a moment’s pause, ‘is the original.’

‘Good Heavens!’ ejaculated Mr. Margrave. ‘How ill she looks!’

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE picture to which Christine had called Graysett's attention stood back in a recess close to where they were standing. Some Oriental hangings, falling low, framed the nook ; and the easel itself was draped with a quantity of creamy Indian muslin which added to the somewhat vaporous effect of the unfinished portrait. A cunningly shaded lamp concentrated its rays upon the features and more particularly upon the eyes, which gazed out of the canvas with that startled, unearthly expression which was at times Judith's most striking peculiarity.

Only the head had been worked in, and this with touches so delicate and yet so telling,

that the face seemed that of some unique being hardly to be bound by material laws, rather than the countenance of a woman of flesh and blood, leading the life of society, and subject to the petty interests and desires of ordinary womanhood.

Christine had approached her subject with that rare sympathy, that power of discerning the ideal man or woman through his or her grosser covering, which in the portrait-painter is inspiration. She had caught that ineffable something in Judith's personality—not coldness, not purity, not ignorance of evil, but something even more negative than these, which seemed to place the girl upon a different level from warm, passionate, frail, yet *strong* humanity. For in Judith this unlikeness did not seem owing to the spirituality of a more highly developed and refined nature. It appeared, rather, the conscious want of an

embryo spirit, prematurely evolved, who had somehow missed the intermediary experience by which human sympathies might have been gained, and to whom all experience must be more or less bewildering and abnormal.

At Mr. Margrave's exclamation, Graysett turned from the face of the girl he had known to the woman he longed yet dreaded to see.

She was descending the steps, leaning upon her husband's arm, and for a moment they halted and surveyed the scene. Esmé sublimely self-conscious, vigorous, beautiful as of old. Judith clinging to him, as though from his magnificent vitality she derived all the life force that animated her own feebler frame. Involuntarily, there occurred to Graysett Mrs. Rainshaw's simile of the Vampire, and a shudder of horror turned him cold.

So altered was she, and in a manner so subtle and strange, that at first his fancy could



only grasp the suggestion of contamination and slowly working morbid poison. He seemed to see looking out from her eyes no longer the untainted, if partly irresponsible, soul, which he had loved and yearned to guard from contact with anything that could defile, but a vexed spirit struggling wildly to escape from maleficent influences which held it in thrall.

This was the allegory he read. To the gay crowd watching her entrance she was a very beautiful woman, in a fantastic costume that illustrated Esmé Colquhoun's noted perception of the harmonious—a woman who had married and enriched the man she loved, and who was probably now making the painful discovery that her infatuation had been a mistake, and that poets must ever be the property not of one but of many. For it was evident to the most casual observation that

her body was being worn by some wasting disease or mental care, and there was a wildness in her eyes which roused the unspoken comment in the minds of those acquainted in any degree with her family history, 'There was always something strange about her; and don't people say that her mother was mad?'

She was dressed after a fashion very unlike the conventional simplicity of her attire before her marriage. The rich velvet brocade falling in heavy folds about her figure, its sheen displaying gleams of dark red and flame colour, was made somewhat in the Italian style of the fifteenth century, with full sleeves and stiff jewelled bodice cut low in front, its gorgeously sombre and tawny hues contrasting agreeably with the old lace covering the bosom, upon which lay a quaintly set pendant of opals and rose diamonds.

Her hair was now curled more elaborately above her forehead, and lay coiled upon her head in a mode that lent majesty to the graceful poise of her throat. A bodkin encrusted with opals apparently held the luxuriant masses in place, and gave forth a lurid shimmer. A slight touch of rouge upon her cheeks seemed to make the pallor and emaciation of her face more noticeable, and to intensify the distraught look in her eyes. Except, however, for their unnatural gleam, she was quite composed, and her bearing showed no hesitation or sign of embarrassment at the attention which she excited. Her mind appeared far away; and though her gaze rested blankly upon Graysett for a second, it was evident that she did not at the instant identify him. Her husband stooped and said something to her in a low tone. She started as though collecting herself, and greeted a lady

standing near her, while there was a dressing up of her face with mechanical smiles.

Christine Borlase advanced with outstretched hand. It was the first time since the marriage of the one, and the widowhood of the other, that Judith and she had met. To those who guessed at the emotions lying below the surface, there was food for curiosity and conjecture in the demeanour of these two women and that of the man whom they had both loved. With the deepest interest Graysett watched the faces of the three.

Esmé stood with lashes drooped, and features set, as though he were aware of the necessity for composure, and prepared to mask any sign of agitation. Christine had turned very pale, and there was a look of pain and perplexity in her eyes, which she kept steadily averted from Esmé and fixed upon his wife. In spite of her self-command, her lips trembled

and her voice vibrated with a womanly sympathy, that, had she not already possessed it, would have won her Graysett's friendship.

‘My dear,’ she said, ‘I am glad to see you again. It was good of you to come, though you are late, and good of you to bring Esmé so soon to see an old friend. He will find many more here—for his reward—and you also. But I am very sorry that you are not looking stronger.’

‘My wife is a hopeless sailor,’ said Esmé, in his rolling tones which travelled far. ‘I owe her a debt of gratitude for having crossed the Atlantic to please me. The American climate did not suit her. We are glad to breathe the atmosphere of London once more. There is none more congenial to us than that of your studio, Mrs. Borlase. You have altered it—a little, I see. It is always artistic and charming.’

Christine replied constrainedly, and Esmé, accosted by a lively American who piqued herself upon saying smart things, and who now began to question' him as to the success of his mission, entered into a serious dissertation upon the susceptibility of the New Yorkers to impressions of the Beautiful, and disarmed sarcasm by the declaration, 'I am charmed with the loveliness of American women, they are my mission realised. And I am charmed with the American openness to truth. There, I have not to contend against the hydra-headed monster, Conventionalism, which I cannot crush in England. I am also charmed with the American sense of humour. They burlesqued me sometimes, but, do you know, I really enjoyed it very much.'

Judith had not spoken. She was gazing intently at Mrs. Borlase, her lips parted in that terrible smile with which one wounded to the

death might try to conceal an almost unendurable pain. There was no reproach, no resentment, no repressed passion in her face, only the look of dumb agony, physical rather than mental, which the sufferer knows cannot be cured.

Christine relinquished her hand. A spasm as of relief seemed to pass through Judith's frame. Christine watched her in troubled wonder, and tried affectionately to draw her into conversation, receiving only mechanical and dreamy answers. Graysett came forward and joined the group. Perceiving him, Esmé turned and shook hands with him in a manner remarkably cordial, pressing him to visit them at an early opportunity, and giving their address, which, with a start, Graysett recognised as that of the house which had been left to Judith, and which she had identified with the scene of his vision.

‘We are there only temporarily, of course,’ said the poet carelessly; ‘till we can furnish another abode to our taste. It was ready, and its incongruities, if bizarre, are not vulgar. And at least it is less glaring than an hotel.’

He turned away, and sauntered through the room, smiling and bowing now to one and now to another with the serene self-complacency of a monarch dispensing favours. Judith suffered her hand to remain for a moment in that of Graysett. She smiled with much sweetness, and her features lighted up, as he remembered so well had been their wont when the conversation had touched upon the subjects which interested her.

‘You are better?’ she exclaimed earnestly. ‘You are quite well now! Oh, I have hoped so that you would get quite better! I have often thought of you—and wondered——’



She paused abruptly, and withdrew her hand. His heart swelled with pleasure, and then was pierced by a pang of sorrow. It struck him vividly that this was the first time in his knowledge of her—which was so small in measure and yet so rich—that she had seemed drawn out of herself by natural and healthy solicitude for another. In the old days, even when his whole being had been wrung with passionate yearning towards her, no corresponding sympathy had been awakened in her. She had never appeared capable of entering into his feeling. She had never regarded him by any other light than that of her own egotism. Her attitude towards him and towards herself had always been analytical; and his pain, his anxiety, had moved her only in so far as they affected her strange theory of self-development.

The same thought seemed to occur to Christine Borlase.

‘You and Major Graysett were always great allies at Leesholm, I remember,’ said she, ‘and I will place you in his care, for you are not strong enough to stand ; but St. André is gazing at me reproachfully, for I promised to persuade Signor Torriano to play his accompaniment. You have never heard St. André? He is quite new. You will be charmed. Major Graysett, I see a seat vacant beside Madame Tamvaco. Take Mrs. Colquhoun to it. Mr. Margrave is waiting there to introduce you, and is seizing the opportunity to imbibe a little wisdom on his own account. I have been accusing him of flirting with the Sibyl, and I begin to think that his soul is not so dependent on his digestion as he would have us believe. Judith, I leave you in confidence—unless, indeed, Esmé has weaned you from

Occultism to Art. You used to be very much interested in Madame Tamvaco.'

Graysett offered Judith his arm.

'I remember,' he said, 'this is the lady of whom you spoke to me at Leesholm.'

He felt that she shuddered slightly. 'Yes,' she replied. 'It was she who warned me against crossing the Threshold. . . . How strange that evening was!' she went on dreamily. 'It was the beginning. You interested me; and I only made you unhappy. I am glad that I did not do you lasting harm. You have not gone back to India!'

'I am never going back again,' he answered. 'I am here, ready to help you, if at any time you need me.'

'I need help now,' she murmured. 'I need it sorely. I need the help which would turn me into a little child again, and make me think of good things instead of what is wicked

and horrible. That is what you cannot do for me—neither you nor anyone else. Hush, don't speak. I will try to tell you—some day when we are alone—not now.'

The sweet notes of the French tenor rang through the room, and everyone listened. They had reached the sofa on which Madame Tamvaco was seated. Mr. Margrave rose and retired into the background pending the conclusion of the song. Two or three eager-looking men pressed round the Sibyl, but she was not talking. She had been following Judith's movements; and now that the latter approached her, silently bowed her head, and motioned her to her side. When Monsieur St. André rose from the piano, there was a little confusion and dispersion. Madame Tamvaco turned to Judith, and looked her through and through with her great witch-like eyes.

'I have not forgotten you,' she said at

length, in a deep, rather harsh voice, with a very un-English intonation. ‘You used always to wear white, and now you do not dress in white, but in red and flame colour. It is I who am in white—I whom they call a witch; and you are in witches’ garments! Why do you not keep to your white? Why did you marry Esmé Colquhoun?’

‘Madame,’ said Judith calmly, though she was trembling with suppressed excitement, ‘I married my husband because I loved him.’

‘Hear!’ exclaimed Madame Tamvaco in an accent which had in it more of pity than of irony. ‘This fever which wastes the flesh and burns the soul is Love! You would not listen to me. You did once come to this misshapen wise woman for knowledge, and I said, “Wait. Grope in the darkness till your eyes can bear the light. Never yield your will to another. Fly any influence which threatens to overpower

it. Cling to your intuition as you would cling to your Saviour." They were golden rules, but you would not heed them. You would be another Eve. And see—you come to me again and I can do nothing for you.'

'Madame Tamvaco,' said Judith, with a dignity of which at that moment Graysett could not have imagined her capable, 'when I need your help, I will not ask for it in a place like this.'

Her reply seemed partly to amuse, partly to please, the strange woman. She put out her thin, bird-like claw, upon the forefinger of which was a ring engraved in Oriental characters, and patted Judith's arm.

'That is good. I forget that I am in the world where masks are always necessary, and where the nakedness of your minds must needs be covered. For me, there are no masks. It is strange to see you all as you are, and to see

the thoughts which project themselves from you. I will tell you,' she added, looking round the group, 'something which you perhaps do not know, but which is true—as true as that you have each an astral body ; though that is a fact these scientific gentlemen deny.'

A smile crossed the faces of one or two who were listening.

'Ah !' cried Madame Tamvaco, 'I am not scientific? Herr Klein will not admit me into his brotherhood of physiologists ! Is that so ? Well, listen to me. There are a great many mysteries which puzzle you scientists but which are no mysteries to me. I know them. They are facts, and I have been shown the natural laws which govern them. For example, can you physiologists tell me anything about the spleen ?'

'Its functions have not been clearly defined,' said a heavy-looking man, who spoke with a German accent.

‘Then when you have learned to define the functions of the spleen, which we consider the storehouse of vital energy, you shall tell me why the laws of nature will not permit me to have an astral body. And now, I will inform you that around each of you there is an aura—an emanation, in which your thoughts, the likeness of those upon whom your imagination dwells, and the influences which prompt your words and actions, take shape and are visible to the eyes of those who see. And I can assure you that if you believed what I said you would be sorry that I should see through the foul and mephitic atmosphere which encompasses some of you to whom I am speaking—the noxious things you have attracted to yourselves.’

‘You are frank, Madame,’ said the German who had spoken before. ‘But will you submit to a test of your powers of thought-reading?’

‘I am true,’ rejoined she; ‘and truth has



ever been stoned and crucified. You crucify me in your papers. You stone me with your ridicule. You like to call me a charlatan and a fraud, because I will not ring astral bells and perform juggling tricks to please you. If you desire it, Herr Klein, I will tell you what I see.'

She bent towards him, and for a few moments talked rapidly in an undertone. She spoke in German, but so fast and so low that only a word here and there was intelligible.

Herr Klein looked visibly discomposed. 'Cease, Madame. That is sufficient.'

'Well?' she asked with triumphant irony. 'Do I not tell you truth? Am I a clever thought-reader? Will you have me on a platform in competition with your Mr. Irving Bishop? Say, and let me light my cigarette. Mr. Margrave, where is my fan? It is sandalwood and I cannot lose it.'

Mr. Margrave opined gravely that the fan

had taken to itself an astral body, and that it would be impossible to account for its vagaries.

Madame Tamvaco puffed reflectively for a few moments, then threw the cigarette away. 'Why did I not bring my own *tabac*?' she cried. 'Say,' she repeated imperatively, fixing Herr Klein, 'did I tell you truly?'

'I do not recommend these gentlemen to test your powers, Madame,' drily replied the German.

'Ah, my good Klein! it is possible to have an aura which will bear the scrutiny of clear eyes. But now you shall leave me. I will talk to you no more. I am going home, and before I go I wish to speak to Mrs. Colquhoun.'

The knot dispersed. Graysett would have withdrawn also, but Madame Tamvaco detained him by a gesture. 'Stay. I do not know your name, but you interest me.'

'Madame Tamvaco,' said Mr. Margrave,

who hovering near had caught her abrupt address, 'I had already charged myself with the pleasure of making you acquainted with Major Graysett. He is good material—a convert worth making.'

'I am not a propagandist, Mr. Margrave,' said the Seeress coldly, 'or *you* would have been converted, as you term it, ere this. Take care. No one ever yet escaped me who rashly plunged into the maelstrom of my psychic influence. However, for the present, I am not concerned with you. Come and see me on Saturday when I receive. And if you would do me a favour, go and look for my fan. . . . I am charmed to know you, Major Graysett,' she added with a very winning smile. 'You will see that I have both my exoteric and esoteric meanings. You may safely hear what I have to say to this sadly unfortunate woman, for in your aura I behold only one predomi-

nating thought ; and that shapes itself into her image.'

Judith looked up at him with a strange smile, in which there was mingled joy and reproach.

The blood rose to Graysett's brow. 'Madame Tamvaco,' he said gravely, 'there is in my mind no thought of Mrs. Colquhoun which may not be read by a true-hearted woman.'

Madame Tamvaco did not reply. She appeared to be studying him closely.

Judith, no longer composed, touched her hand. 'Tell me,' she whispered with a sort of passionate eagerness, 'what is it that you see in me? What is it that has changed me? Is it a crime to love? What have I done to be so tortured?'

An expression of the tenderest compassion swept over the face of the Seeress, humanising

its hard grandeur, while her voice softened as she replied in a dreamy tone, unlike the brusqueness of her former mode of speech—

‘Do you not know that each life we live is but one step of the Infinite Ladder which we must all mount to reach Eternity—but one day in the ages through which each spirit must pass to gain the Perfect Rest! You Christians preach that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap, and never was more sublime truth conveyed in simple words. But you fall into the error of taking an infinitesimal part as the Great Whole—of regarding one day as all Time, one night as Eternity. For in Nature there are no contradictions. The night of dreaming which follows day is not the harvest. That which we reap is sown in the previous life, and the seedtime of the one is the harvest of the other.’

‘Tell me,’ said Judith again, still more

earnestly, 'how can I learn from you? I have no faith. I have no hope. I am haunted by terrors. I am in chains. Can you not break them? While I am with you, a light seems to come to me; but I know not at what moment the darkness may fall again. Save me from becoming wicked. You refused to teach me once. Will you refuse again?'

'My poor woman!' said the Seeress. 'I can teach you, but I cannot deliver you. If compassion and love could work deliverance, would not the whole earth have been freed by One who said, "Let me be cursed, but let Humanity be happy"? Salvation is within yourself, in the immortal spirit over which neither man nor elementary thing can gain the complete mastery. It may be driven from your body, but while there is in your heart the faintest aspiration after good, the faintest loathing of evil, it will never forsake you.'

You came to me once, and I warned you. I could do no more. I knew that the peculiarity of your organisation exposed you to perils which you were not capable of comprehending. To rise to the spiritual plane, meant for you an ordeal for which in this life you could never be prepared. Safety lay for you on the physical plane, and in the development of your human sympathies, and heart love—a different thing to the mere magnetic attraction which could only reawaken in you a dormant sense, and which is the medium of approach to your worst enemies.'

'And now?' interrupted Judith with agnised eagerness.

'How can I here, in a few words, expound the most subtle of philosophical problems? What is Evil, and by what means does it gain influence over the soul? The theologians would do away with the Devil; but while

matter exists they can never do away with evil. Evil and good are the two opposing forces, which, acting and reacting upon each other, result in the life of the universe. Listen. The atmosphere around us is crowded with forces, currents, influences, intelligences—call them what you will—to which we are more or less sensitive, according to individual temperament and moral and physical conditions. In some the barrier which divides our souls from these invisibles needs but the lightest touch to be thrown down. This may be done by the force of our own purified aspirations, or by the will of a strongly magnetic person dissimilarly electrified to ourselves, who has within himself the power of controlling these forces, and who, in proportion as he is pure or impure, attracts the malignant or the beneficent, not only to himself, but to the subject whom he has infected with his own magnetism.



‘You are one of those unfortunate beings unprotected by a physical barrier, or by the strength and inherent purity of your own soul. Had you listened to the voice of your intuition, you would have fled from the man who is your husband as you would flee from a foul vapour. To you he is deadly. He has the potentialities of a god or a demon. Ages to come will determine which. It is more than probable that knowledge will direct his will ; and his aspirations—for he has the capacity to aspire—becoming gradually purified, may force him to choose the good. But with this, *you* have nothing to do. Your love for him has been mere physical attraction. You have never inspired him with one holy impulse. In marrying you, he did violence to his better self. You have never stimulated his yearning after the ideal even in its lower forms. Therein lies *his* hope of salvation. It is not

*you* who have any power to influence his highest destinies.'

She ceased. All this had been poured forth very rapidly and in a low, penetrating voice which seemed to come from far away, and yet pierced the very souls of her listeners. Her eyes were strangely large and luminous, with a shadow of trouble in their depths; and they were bent neither upon Judith nor Graysett, but gazed into space, as though there, this mystic drama of conflicts and affinities was unfolding itself before her inner vision. By some strange spell she seemed to have abstracted herself and these two from the noisy throng, so that the incongruity between her transcendental utterances and the frivolous scene of which they made part, did not seem apparent. A few people passed to and fro, but none halted to address them.

The crowd had now somewhat thinned, drawn into the illuminated garden by a miniature display of fireworks planned by one of Christine's aides-de-camp. The success of Mrs. Borlase's receptions was certainly due to their absolute informality, and to the fact that no one appeared to see anything remarkable in the doings of anyone else. The studio and garden were the Paradise of lovers and the initiatory scene of many a flirtation. Now, cigarette smoke clouded the atmosphere, and the corks of soda and seltzer water bottles flew as the guests helped themselves at the little refreshment tables placed at convenient angles within and without. The large window rising from the ground was thrown wide open, and the soft night air sent a fresh current through the heated room.

At that moment Colquhoun entered with Mrs. Borlase on his arm. The latter detached

herself from him, and, accepting the escort of Herr Klein, returned to the garden.

Judith rose as though obeying an inaudible summons. That strange, rapt, yet wild, look returned to her face. She was ghastly save for the artificial colouring on her cheeks, and her hands trembled violently. She made a few steps forward, and then tottered blindly, and would have fallen, but that her husband had reached her side, and received her unconscious form in his arms.

## CHAPTER XIX.

JUDITH's attack seemed rather a vertigo than a fainting fit. In a few moments she recovered, and, gazing bewilderedly around, uttered some incoherent words, then quietly suffered her husband to lead her away from the studio. Shortly after, they had gone, Mrs. Borlase re-entered from the garden. She looked anxious and alarmed, and went straight to Major Graysett.

‘What was the matter with Mrs. Colquhoun?’ she inquired abruptly. ‘I am told that she fainted.’

‘That is true,’ he replied; ‘but she recovered almost directly, and has gone away

with her husband. She does not appear to be at all strong.'

'Do you think that she is happy?' asked Christine pointedly.

'No,' he answered bitterly. 'Did you expect to find her so? I never imagined that the marriage—whatever its advantages to him—would bring her happiness.'

'Oh, Major Graysett, do not speak in that tone!' exclaimed Christine earnestly. 'Have you not always been a little unjust to Esmé? No one could doubt her devotion to him; and even his worst enemies acknowledge that he appears deeply attached to her. You do not understand his nature. We all need a little sympathetic allowance—we artists. It is our spontaneity which misleads.'

She waited for a moment, but he said nothing. It occurred to him that she would hardly expect sympathy or spontaneity from

one so apparently self-contained as himself. In truth, there seemed to him something exquisitely pathetic in this identification of her own weakness with the faults of the man she loved.

‘You don’t answer,’ she exclaimed.

‘What can I say? You plead eloquently; but I make no accusation. I am not an artist. It needs a wide range of sympathies to embrace all motives.’

‘Few people are capable of understanding Esmé,’ continued Christine. ‘He is judged too leniently or too harshly. In spite of his affectations, his egotism—I admit these—there is in his nature a simplicity—a clinging affectionateness—an intense admiration for what is beautiful, tender, and lovable, which cannot fail to make the happiness of his wife. Then think of the gratitude which a man in his position must feel towards the woman who has

given him everything, and who has freed his genius from sordid shackles. And Esmé has more than a spark of nobility: he has the capacity for greatness—greatness of soul. You will not believe so?’

‘Indeed, Mrs. Borlase,’ said Graysett, ‘you are right. I am not a fit person to gauge Esmé Colquhoun’s moral capabilities. But if there were needed any impetus to elevate a man’s character, it would surely be found in the trustful love of an innocent girl, and in the faith of a woman like yourself.’

He had spoken absently, hardly realising the personal application of his words. They produced a marked effect upon the artist. Her frank eyes drooped; she coloured deeply, and turned away, saying no more. . . . .  
Madame Tamvaco had come forward to bid her hostess good-night. The strange, deformed little figure, in its loose, gleaming robe, sur-



mounted by that majestic head and the coronal of snow-white hair, struck Graysett anew with admiration mingled with a sense of the grotesque. The feeling was intensified, perhaps, by the contrast which the Seeress presented to an extremely tall, unpliant-looking lady, much younger than herself, who stood evidently waiting to accompany her.

This lady—an American, to judge by her accent, which, to use a vulgar phrase, might have been cut with a knife—wore a high-necked cashmere gown that draped her slim, angular, but not ungraceful form in straight folds, and suggested the divided skirt, and theories concerning the dress of a rational woman. She did not, however, despise ornaments, for diamonds twinkled in her ears and round her throat, and the frizz of fair hair above her forehead was decidedly after the prevailing mode. It was certain that she had

a very distinct personality, and the sort of gaze which seemed to indicate that she knew what she wanted, and that her aims were somewhat higher than those of the herd. She was undoubtedly interesting; and, notwithstanding her lankness, her unpleasing voice, and the peculiarity of her attire, was feminine and even spiritual in appearance.

Madame Tamvaco accepted, or, more correctly, demanded, Major Graysett's escort to her carriage; and on their way through the suite of rooms, while they were waiting for their wraps, introduced her friend as Mrs. Edye.

'Well,' said the latter with a quick little nod, 'I shouldn't wonder if we get to know each other pretty well; for I suspect that Madame has found out you have got capabilities; and if that is so, you won't be too anxious to escape from her.'

‘At this moment,’ said Madame Tamvaco, ‘he is angry with me. He thinks that I have been cruel.’

‘Oh, you mustn’t mind that!’ said Mrs. Edye quietly, taking Madame Tamvaco’s hand with an affectionate gesture. ‘The old lady has her faults. Isn’t it so? She is a little ill-balanced; she is impatient. But she is a great woman. She is so great, that if she were the horned devil himself, I couldn’t be induced to leave her. You’ll come to feeling like that. She is great enough to see through your faults and weaknesses, and to take you up beyond them, for the sake of your capabilities. Come to our reception on Saturday, Major Graysett. Come with Mr. Margrave—98 Barlow Crescent, St. John’s Wood, that’s the address—from three-thirty to six.’

‘Thank you,’ said Graysett, ‘I will certainly come. In the meantime I had better see

whether there's any chance of your getting off.'

The brougham which a fashionable devotee had placed at Madame Tamvaco's disposal could not be found ; and it was with difficulty that the footman was discovered, and sent in search of it to the nearest public-house. Graysett informed Madame Tamvaco of the delay, and put a chair for her in the window recess, from which position she could watch the people passing to and fro. She immediately asked him for a cigarette, and philosophically proceeded to smoke, though she gave vent to a forcible and unphilosophical ejaculation as she again lamented not having brought her *tabac*. This contrast between her unfeminine speech and habits, and the music of her voice and eloquence of her manner, when her deepest feelings were stirred, was extraordinary and bewildering. Graysett marvelled at the oppos-

ing characteristics she presented, and the idea struck him that her exoteric demeanour, not assisted by 'phenomena,' was hardly calculated to create, in the minds of the uninitiated, a lofty conception of her esoteric doctrine—whatever that might be.

But a gesture on her part arrested the thought, and claimed his attention.

'Major Graysett, listen to me. I know that you have a deep and pure interest in the welfare of this miserable woman, whose heart-strings have been strained almost to breaking this evening. She will send for you shortly. Go to her. Encourage her to open to you the secrets of her struggling soul. Do not let any personal consciousness, any doubt of your own motives, deter you from facing the ordeal which is before you. I warn you that it may be a severe one.' She is shadowed by a diabolical influence, which is urging her to her destruc-

tion. Gain her confidence. You can do for her now what I cannot. Then come to me. Hereafter, I may be of the greatest service to her and to you ; but she must first be released from her bondage. That is your task. . . . No, not a word more at present. Go and talk to Mrs. Edye, and come and tell me when I must move. I am in no hurry. I want to finish my cigarette ; and I have a word to say to my American Professor whom I see yonder.'

She beckoned to a light-whiskered, disjointed-looking individual, with an enthusiastic eye, and general air of inward preoccupation, who was in the act of struggling into his overcoat, and who obeyed her summons with alacrity.

Graysett approached Mrs. Edye, to whom the knots of prettily cloaked women waiting for their carriages, the snatches of frivolous chatter, and the prevailing characteristics of

a scene in which she stood a comparative stranger, seemed to afford food for interest and amusement, for she was smiling seriously.

‘Where’s Madame Tamvaco?’ she asked. ‘Sitting down! Oh, I guess she is exhausted by the mixed magnetism. It’s very trying to a sensitive.’

‘May I inquire,’ said Graysett, ‘whether you divide the world into the persons who are “sensitives” and those who are not?’

‘That’s very much how it appears to us,’ said Mrs. Edye frankly, ‘if you are just taking humanity into consideration. It’s the people with the psychic powers who interest me—the men and women of the future. I was watching a lady this evening. You know her. She was talking to Madame; and she is married to that poet they make such a fuss over. I couldn’t quite place her. I was a long way off her. But I’d like to diagnose her. I think she is an

opportunity for me. There's something queer about her, any way.'

'That lady is a friend of mine,' said Graysett abruptly. He felt an involuntary repugnance to hearing Judith discussed by Mrs. Edye.

'I didn't mean to be irreverent,' said Mrs. Edye, with her clear straight look. 'I shall place her next time, I dare say. That's my way of diagnosing a case. I look and look, then gradually all that I want to know unfolds itself, and I see what people's lives and characters are, and what they are suffering from. I often think it isn't exactly fair; but I do it for practice; and it is purely a scientific interest that I take. I wasn't very successful this evening. If I had been close to the Old Lady, I should have got strength from her.'

'Is that possible?'

'Why, certainly. Just as another person



gives you a light for your cigarette. Impetus of the will, you know. But you mustn't take me for an authority, I only came over to learn ; I want to find truth ; I want to be true to my highest capabilities—that's the only thing worth living for ; all the rest is froth. I just *will* a thing, and I go on.'

'Go on—to what?' asked Graysett vaguely.

'Why, to the higher development,' said Mrs. Edye. 'Your scientists allow us to evolve up to humanity, and there they build a blank wall, as though because we had got so far, it wasn't possible to get any farther. I don't call that logical—do you? We've been developing our bodily and intellectual senses, and now we are beginning to develop our spiritual ones. I don't see why we are to jump straight from men and women to angels, any more than we jumped from molluscs to men. That's reasonable, isn't it?'

Graysett assented.

‘We who are a step or two in advance,’ went on Mrs. Edye, ‘should be ready to help the struggling children forward—to teach them to exercise their growing powers, and how to avoid dangers. That is what I want to do, Major Graysett: I want to be a doctor on the higher system. I don’t care two straws about phenomena; but I want to see the laws of spiritual chemistry applied to the Evolution of the Race. In marriage, for instance, the affinities ought to be regulated. You know, the influence of a grossly material person must retard spiritual progress. Just think of the positive injury which may be received from impure magnetism! Why, it’s terrible! There’s a great deal written about the sacredness of marriage and the union after death; but it’s all a question of affinities. If you have been in contact with a person only upon the physical

plane, you cannot be together upon the spiritual one.'

'That's a bit of Swedenborg's doctrine,' said Graysett.

'Perhaps it is,' said Mrs. Edye. 'Anyhow, it's the doctrine of the New Pythagoreans.'

At that moment the servant made his appearance, and Graysett went back to Madame Tamvaco, and offered her his arm to the carriage. Mrs. Edye accepted that of the American Professor, with whom she appeared to be on terms of good understanding.

## CHAPTER XX.

UPON the following morning a note from Judith was delivered by hand to Graysett, requesting that he would call upon her at half-past four that afternoon. He had not expected so prompt a summons. Remembering Esmé's cordiality the evening before, which at the time had surprised him, he felt a sudden and inexplicable conviction that the poet, rather than his wife, was the originator of the invitation.

He could not account for the feeling, and yet it haunted him all day, and more persistently than ever during his drive to the Colquhouns' house.

The villa, which Judith had once called her monstrosity, was situated in a suburb not usually resorted to by fashionable people. It stood within narrow grounds, and had the conventional lawn, fountain, and shrubbery, with stucco figures surmounting the important gateway. The building itself was a chaos of gables, miniature turrets, Gothic arches, and excrescences generally, which seemed to represent the architectural nightmare of a City alderman.

Graysett was taken into a magnificently furnished drawing-room, with a conservatory leading out of it, which, nevertheless, gave the impression of an uninhabited desert, it was so evident that no one lived in it. The servant retired, but presently reappeared with the announcement that Mrs. Colquhoun would be glad to see Major Graysett; and led the way through a long corridor into what was evi-

dently another wing of the house. Graysett shuddered, as he entered the oblong Japanese ante-chamber, through which he had passed in his vision; and recognised the bronzes, the Florentine cabinets, the mixture of Oriental and European *bric-à-brac*—the double door. . . . . A second time he halted upon the threshold of the boudoir, again overpowered by that feeling of clammy horror and indescribable dread. . . . . It seemed to wear off after a moment or two; and he became conscious that Judith was alone, and that she was advancing to greet him.

She was dressed on this occasion, also, after a somewhat fantastic fashion—in a robe of a peculiar yellow tint, profusely trimmed with old lace, and embroidered in a sort of arabesque pattern, glittering here and there with threads of gold and silver. The clinging folds falling from her shoulders had a gleaming,

scaly appearance, and seemed to impart a serpentine grace to her movements.

The change in her—to be felt rather than defined—afflicted him now with even keener pain than when he had first beheld her upon the previous evening. Had he been a dispassionate observer, he might have fancied it the sort of transformation which may take place in an actress, whose genius identifies her with a revolting character, when, so ghastly is the reality of the impersonation, the spectator is tempted to believe in witchcraft, and in the possibility of her body being possessed by the spirit of the being she represents.

But the suggestions which rose in his mind were even more tragic.

Judith's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes glowed with the unnatural lustre which had struck him as so unlike their former dreamy expression. At the same time, they had a rapt,

fearful look, as though she were preyed upon by some terrifying inward consciousness. A smile lighted her features; but was it his fancy which discerned in it a seductiveness that jarred against his finer instincts? In her whole demeanour there was something false—something meretricious, something dangerous—he knew not how to characterise it, which thrilled him with a vague uneasiness. He saw no reflection of the sweet, impersonal enthusiasm which had in old time lent such charm to her too thoughtful countenance.

She was agitated; her gestures were nervous. A tremulous movement fluttered the lace which lay over her bosom. Frail and attenuated as was her frame, it seemed more pliant; the pose of her head less statuesque; and the loose fall of her ruffle back from her throat, where the robe was but carelessly closed, revealed dimples and delicate curves



and depressions, as captivating as the soft contours of a child.

The room was suffused by a dim, rose-coloured light, and breathed a subtle perfume: Oriental odours, blending with the scent of tea roses and hothouse flowers, which lay in profusion upon the table, and crowded the fireplace. In spite of incongruities of taste, a fastidious, almost enervating, luxury pervaded the apartment. At first, Graysett longed to throw open the shutters, and to admit fresh air and unblenching sunshine, so that he might counteract, as it were, the spell which in his imagination was woven round them both. For this Judith—strange, languid, alluring, full of tender *abandon*, was not the ethereal being who had once seemed to him too pure for coarser worship than that of the soul.

For an instant or two, his heart swelled with passionate revolt. . . . And then the

enchantment stole over his senses, and he was in a new dream from which horror and tragedy had faded away.

It did not occur to him as strange that she should not refer to the identity of the room in which they were, with the scene of his vision at Leesholm. He hardly knew what words were first spoken between them, or whence had arisen the mutual consciousness, at once delicious and embarrassing, which put explanation out of the question. He only knew that he was holding her little hot hand, and that its touch was like that of no other hand he had ever pressed; it was trembling; and the feeling of it lingered even after it had been withdrawn. He was overcome by the charm of her appearance, and by the gentle emotion that seemed to exhale from her, and to float caressingly around him. It was with a start that he suddenly recalled Madame Tamvaco's

warning, and Judith's fainting fit at Mrs. Borlase's reception. He felt a sensation of shock of horror at his temporary aberration. His mental attitude changed. It was as though someone invisible had touched him and brought him back to himself. The spell was partially broken. He inquired in a conventional manner after her health, and hoped that she had recovered from her indisposition of last night.

A little pucker of pain or perplexity knit Judith's brow.

'Last night!' she repeated. 'Was I ill? I don't remember. I am quite well. Don't let us talk of those things. I don't want to think of last night now.'

'Of what things shall we talk?' he asked, gently. 'Of old days at Leesholm?'

'No, no; I was not kind to you then. I did not understand. I was in a dream, and I

only knew the things which came to me in my dream.'

'The dream was sweeter than the reality,' said Graysett sadly.

'No,' she repeated doubtfully. 'It may have been to you, but it was not to me. Life is all dreams,' she went on. 'Some are cold and formless, full of shadows; and some are terrible, like nightmares; and in others the shadows seem real things—delights of sense and sight and sound. Then beauty thrills one, and love speaks. Why may we not always dream such dreams? Why should we strain up towards the stars when the earth is full of flowers? Why should we not live and enjoy?'

She sank upon a pile of cushions heaped upon the hearthrug, and put out her hand to a great china bowl filled with blossoms. She drew forth a cluster of tea roses and some

sprays of delicate heliotrope. She held the flowers before her, touching the rose petals tenderly, and brushing the heliotrope with her lips.

‘Why should we not live and enjoy?’ she repeated. ‘There’s nothing else in the world that’s real. The spirit, which seemed so beautiful, vanishes away. But the form remains; and that is beautiful too. And if the flowers fade, there are fresh ones to be gathered.’

‘Oh, Judith!’ he cried. ‘Is this the highest philosophy which your marriage has taught you?’

She gazed at him for a moment in an absent way, as though something in his voice more than in his words had arrested and turned the train of her thoughts.

‘You have never called me Judith before!’ she said, meditatively. ‘It is not a pretty name. It is harsh and unsympathetic—as I

was. I don't want to be that—any more. . . . Do you recollect when I asked you your name? Edward! Are you going to be my friend?'

'You know,' he answered, 'that my life is consecrated to you.'

'Is that true? You give me a great deal. How can I repay you?'

'I want no payment, except to help in making you happy—and good.'

'Happy!' she echoed. 'Yes. You make me less unhappy. I have been better since I saw you last night. Good! That's something positive—it is a different matter. I don't think that I know what is good, and what is bad.'

She rose abruptly, and hovered restlessly about for a minute or two, while he watched her in wretched wondering and excitement. She paused before an inlaid table, upon which stood a tea equipage in old silver. The

pedestal of the table was twined with curiously wrought brazen serpents, the tails of which formed its support. The hissing of the kettle seemed to proceed from their distended jaws. The blue flame of the spirit lamp leaped up. He watched her put it out with a quaint sort of extinguisher, which attracted his attention from its singularity. Everything was strange, but nothing so strange as Judith herself. There even seemed a curious aroma about the tea which she poured out, and handed to him.

‘It is not made in the English way,’ she said ; ‘but you will like it.’

He drank, and put down the cup.

‘Do you like it?’ she asked ; ‘if you do, I will teach you how to make it.’

‘Yes,’ he replied almost angrily. ‘But what do I care?’ and added passionately, ‘It’s you I want to hear of. Tell me of yourself.’

She sat down again upon her pile of

cushions. 'I am so tired,' she murmured plaintively. 'If I were to tell you about myself, I should never end. Last night—I was ill, you know. . . I very often turn giddy suddenly, and afterwards I am tired and stupid for a little while.'

'If this be the case you ought to consult a doctor,' said Graysett decidedly. 'Why does not your husband call in a physician? No one could look at you and not feel sure you were in bad health.'

'I will not see a doctor,' she exclaimed with excitement. 'I am my own mistress, and no one can force me to speak against myself. I will tell *you*, but I will not tell a doctor. I have thought for a long time that I would tell you everything. And if you hated me and turned from me, I should know that it was true, and that I was a wicked woman—without hope.'



‘I *could* not hate you,’ said Graysett in a deep shaken voice. ‘I could never turn from you. Even if you were really bad, and that is impossible, it would only be the stronger reason why I should hold fast to you, and save you from your worst self. This is what I want you to fix firmly in your mind. If you could realise it, you would open your whole heart to me. And then you could never question my sympathy—my devotion.’

For several minutes Judith sat silent. There was a look of effort and of struggling consciousness upon her face. She put her hand to her forehead in a helpless manner.

‘You don’t know how difficult it is to explain it in cold blood. You don’t know the strangeness of it. It is like living two lives—the one his life; and the other—how can I describe it? When I am not living it, I could fancy it the memory of a nightmare. And

when the horror grows and becomes real, I feel that I am possessed by a devil. . . And then, I have gone down upon my knees to him and have prayed that he would kill me. I cannot tell him what it is—the horror—I have tried—for I have thought that in his knowledge there might be safety. But the words are stifled in my throat, and I cannot. If he knew, he would strike me dead.’

She spoke quite quietly, giving utterance to the gruesome hints as though she were alluding to the experience of another person, which her intellect comprehended, but which her imagination failed to realise. He longed to question her; but dared not, recognising the necessity for allowing her broken revelations to come forth in their own way.

‘Do not tell me anything more now,’ he said soothingly. ‘Wait till your mind is clear. I only want to feel sure that you will give me

your confidence—and you will, in your own time. Then I can try and comfort you. Now, it is difficult, when I know so little. I can only feel for you to the depths of my heart. If you think it would be better, I will go away and come again. You have only to send for me, and I will come.'

She seemed to shrink from his suggestion.

'No, no; I could not bear you to leave me. Be patient for a little while. You must let me talk to you as the thoughts come. You said that you wished to make me good. Don't try that;' and by a curious but brief transition to her first mood, she resumed for a few moments her former tone. 'That would mean some sort of conflict, and it's rest I want. . . And, then, I don't believe in goodness. It's like the spirit which vanishes. It's the shadow which eludes you, and yet is always before

you mocking your soul, and blackening the pleasures which might satisfy the bodily part of you. Only try to keep me at peace. Don't let me fall back upon myself. You might be a defence against——' She paused and shuddered. Her voice broke, and became a whisper that froze his heart. 'You might keep the glamour always round me, so that the horrible things which swarm in the darkness could not come near me, and——' Again she shrank, and looked up at him with wild eyes, like a frightened child. 'You would have kept me from this once, if you had been stronger. You know I said that it would need someone very strong. . . But now—now, if you were to will with your whole strength that I should not suffer——'

She half stretched forth her hands with an imploring gesture ; but they fell nervelessly, and she sat quite still, with her eyes down-

cast, and only the muscles of her mouth working.

‘As God is above me,’ he said with an intensity that almost robbed him of voice, ‘I would give my life that you might be spared suffering.’

He had started up at her appeal, and was standing over her. It had seemed to annihilate strangeness, conventional remoteness—even personal feeling. All the bewildering emotions she had roused in him since he had entered her presence—the sense of spell, the confusion of his motives, the need he had felt of some definite word or action on her part, which should give him full realisation of the position—all were merged in the fierce desire to save her—at any cost to himself, which welled up within him like a fountain of spiritual strength answering to her call.

His old fantastic belief, that in the power

of his will lay her protection against evil, took shape in a passionate fervour of resistance, so that it appeared to him that he was beating back invisible foes, and, by the might of inward prayer, creating round himself and her a rampart against the assaults of malignant influences.

So vivid was the impression, so fiery and intense his resolve, that the only natural result seemed a corresponding effect upon her; and he waited, in unswerving faith, for the change to come.

She, too, had risen, and stood before him with limbs relaxed and dazed eyes. But the consciousness which crept slowly over her countenance — heartrending to witness — was yet like the alteration in one from whom an evil spirit had been expelled. Her lips quivered; and her paleness was as the pallor of a corpse. Her gaze sought his with the most

pitiful earnestness and questioning. He took her two hands and clasped them within his own. As he held them, a quiver passed through her frame. Tears gushed forth. Some broken words fell. 'It is going from me. . . . I said. . . . Do you remember? . . . . The spirit rent him sore—Don't leave me. Don't forsake me.'

She tottered, and would have fallen, had he not supported her. He placed her gently in the chair where he had been seated, and kneeled by her, still holding her hands.

She trembled violently. Sobs shook her whole body, till it seemed that she could have no more strength to sustain the deep gasps which were wrung from her bosom's core. Though his heart was strained in an agony of compassion, he had no words to soothe her. He could only dumbly caress her hands, and staunch her tears, as if she had been a child.

whose passion must from its very vehemence ere long exhaust itself.

Gradually the shuddering convulsions ceased, and she lay back stricken but calm. He waited for her to speak. After a little while she said—

‘I want to tell you everything. I can tell you now. Come and sit by me. Don’t kneel, so.’

He obeyed; and still waited in silence. He could not urge her to speech. He had released her hands; but her fingers now groped helplessly, seeking his; and he took them again, and, impelled by an involuntary impulse, reverently kissed them.

She opened her eyes. The strange light had left them. They were soft and clear.

‘Let me hold your hand. It makes me feel that I am not alone. You could have no power if he were near me. You *can* only help



me when his purpose relaxes, and his will ceases to be a force in me.'

'You are speaking of your husband?' said Graysett with determined quietude.

'It began that day—at Leesholm—you know; in the Long Gallery, when I told him that he might do what he liked with me. I gave him leave. . . . I can feel it all now. I had a reckless idea that it was Fate's doing; and that the time I had been always looking forward to, had come—the time against which Madame Tamvaco had warned me. Yes. She knew. She warned me. I did not tell you all. If you had been there, and if you had made me resist, the evil in me might always have remained dormant; or I should have married some one good, who would have kept bad things from getting power over me.' . . . She paused, and the dread returned to her eyes, as she took up her retrospect brokenly.

‘It was always there—from the first time I spoke to him in Christine’s studio—you remember—that strange fascination which was half terror, but which seemed always drawing me. I could not help thinking of it, and wondering always, and longing to test his power. . . . And then, that day, came the opportunity. Something within me told me to resist; but I could not. It was stronger than I. Everything went through my mind like a flash. . . . I thought that this perhaps was the love I had dreamed of, but had never really known—for I had had vague feelings. I can’t describe them. I was afraid of them, and yet I liked to feel them. I liked to think that that was perhaps how other women felt when they loved, and were married—and if it were so, it must be right and human. I wanted to be human, and like other women. I was so frightened—of myself. For I always knew,

even when I was a child—I used to hear people say that I was strange—that I had no heart—no soul. . . .’

Again she halted. He pressed her hand sympathetically ; but dared not speak, lest by some untoward word he might retard her confession. Presently she went on, her brow puckered, her eyes fixed on vacancy, as though she were trying to gather together the fragments of her inward experience.

‘I did not know then that there could be a different kind of love—pure and spiritual, like God’s love—like the light which warms and strengthens but does not burn—the light I told you of—I have only felt sometimes—since then—that it *might be* . . . sometimes, when I have thought of you, and how little I used to care what I made you suffer. . . . And that day, when he seemed to be drawing me to him . . . it was like the desire to throw oneself

down from a high place—like dying, to be made alive again in a new world. For, you know—the fancy I had—that I was supernaturally gifted—and that he could open to me the door of the Unseen and make plain to me the hidden things my mind was always striving after. I had read—I fancied—that to the clairvoyant there are no limits—no mysteries. I believed that if a will—strong enough—could unseal my inner eyes, many other unknown senses would be developed in me, and I should be a perfect woman—and far greater than a woman. . . . But it was all false : it was a lie.’ The compressed passion in her low-toned utterance blazed up, and her voice rose. ‘I was deceived. I deceived myself. In that unseen world there was for me—*nothing*—nothing but the wicked thoughts, the foul imaginations, which were born of me, and which took shape there and became devils

to torment me. . . . *They* were our children—his and mine; the offspring of our minds—mine diseased, and uniting itself with the evil in him. . . . For you don't know—the bad things which had lain as it were, germinating—the books I had read—there was no one to mind what I read. They were there, though I hadn't understood them quite, working in me, poisoning all my thoughts and making me false. . . . It was true—what Madame Tamvaco said—*I* have never appealed to his nobler aspirations. *I* have never influenced his better nature. It is with his worst self that *I* have to do. . . . And so with me, while I am under his influence, I am what his thought makes me. I see with his eyes. I feel with his heart. If he wills what is bad, then I am bad. If he hates, I hate. The evil that is in him is in me—and more—more.'

'But you struggle against the influence?'

cried Graysett, his slowly gathering horror finding vent. 'You do not yield yourself to a power which your soul tells you is your destruction !'

Judith smiled in the melancholy yet acutely intelligent manner of one afflicted by a monomania which tinges every phase of thought.

'Do you not know, that when the soul is driven from the body during a trance, its place is liable to be usurped ; and as the bonds between spirit and flesh grow weaker, return becomes more and more difficult. Don't you believe this? Don't you believe the story of the unclean spirit which went forth and took to himself seven other more wicked spirits? . . . Oh, there are things in the Bible which no one heeds now ; but which are true—just as they were true then—and thousands of years before. There are Mary Magdalenes still, possessed by many devils ; but in these days there is no healer to cast them

out. Death is the only healer ; and he will not come when he is besought.'

'Judith,' said Graysett, almost stern in his passionate earnestness, 'no power, human or superhuman, can separate us from our immortal spirit, which comes from God and will return to Him.'

'Yes! through death,' she answered with the same unnatural calmness. 'I know that. I know that my body is a shell which will crumble into dust; and that when I am dead, my spirit, which is indestructible, will be once more the real *I*, working on through endless ages to its destiny. In the long night between this and the future day, I shall rest and dream. But it is with this body that I feel, and suffer, and love. It is with this body that I sin; and the longer I live the more awful will be its doom.'

'Do not talk of sin or of doom,' he urged

with gentle insistence, feeling the hopelessness of reasoning with this wayward, stricken mind. 'You have done no evil. I do not know yet what it is that you fear; but I know that it lies in your imagination only, and that when your fancy ceases to dwell upon it, the terror will vanish. You have been very unhappy. Your mind is unhinged. Try to believe that help is near you, and that a way will be opened by which you may escape from your trouble.'

'Yes,' she answered slowly, 'I have been very unhappy. You said that it would be so,' she added, another thought appearing to strike her. 'You said that you feared for me death or madness. Do you remember?'

'Oh, don't recall wild words that I had no right to speak!' he cried, shocked by the suggestion that his own prevision of the terrible reality might have preyed upon her imagina-



tion. ‘ That’s all past. It’s the present we must think of. When I know your position more definitely, I shall be better able to help you. Try to take back your memory to when it first began—I mean the horror you spoke of.’

## CHAPTER XXI.

‘It was after our marriage,’ she almost whispered—‘very soon—when we were in America. I can’t describe the beginning. . . . I think I must have been ill,’ she went on after a little pause, piecing her recollections together in the manner of one following lost clues of fact through a labyrinth of confused sensation. ‘I can’t remember distinctly. Often everything got dark. It was all glamour. The happiness—I *was* happy at first—was like an opium dream. . . . Oh! I have taken many drugs. I have tried everything. Nothing is of any use. . . . Sometimes I felt only excitement and joy, and everything was bright. Sometimes I was morbidly miserable; and sometimes dazed.

I don't think other people noticed. . . . I don't know . . . It was a sort of restlessness. I used to want to walk—anywhere—to be always moving. . . . Then, to soothe me, Esmé used to put me into a magnetic trance. . . . He was very kind to me at that time. He is not cruel. It vexed him to see me disturbed. He was interested in the magnetic experiments. . . . At first, I could not remember what happened to me, when I was in the clairvoyant state ; but afterwards I had dim impressions—always of Christine Borlase—always in her studio. . . . Sometimes he showed me poetry that I had written—you remember, that day at Leesholm. . . . That was the first thing which frightened me—for often the poems were not good. There were thoughts in them, passionate, bad thoughts, which should not have come into my mind. He published them ; the papers praised them ; but I begged him, I implored him not to make me write

more. . . . After a little while I began to feel a curious sympathy with him—to know of what he was thinking—to see his mind all naked and horrible—to feel as he felt—not fiercely, or so that it hurt me; but as you feel pain when chloroform is given you; as though it were a long way off. And that was how it came to me—the agony of knowing that he did not love me. He had never loved me. His whole being was bound up in another woman. It had all been false, false from the very first. He had married me for my money. And now he had got my money; and his heart was beating and struggling like a mad thing, to escape and be with that other woman whom he loved. . . . The knowledge crept into me—gradually. I felt it in that numb way; then with lightning-like flashes of pain—knives stabbing me as it were, in a dream; and confused memories when I awoke. The two lives were like two

dreams, distinct from each other, yet blending in after-recollection. But there was a third state, when I was myself; and then, I suffered—oh God, how I suffered! . . . And then, I think it was, that the horror commenced. I was always thinking of what I could do, at those times: of hate and revenge. I hated him, and yet I loved him. I wanted him to be all mine. I couldn't kill him, for my life was in his. . . . But the impulse to kill was so strong—like thirst—it got to take shape. It became like a live thing. It used to whisper "When you go back to England, then you can do what you wish." And because it was impossible there, I was always seeing it in a picture, at night; and in the day, it was before me painted in blood. . . . And I would kneel down and pray—and pray. But that was of no use.'

She fell to shuddering again, and into a

long silence. Graysett clasped her hands together, and involuntarily moved, changing his position slightly. The strain of following her wanderings, through which ran a thread of such ghastly tragedy, was almost unendurable.

‘If thought could cross the ocean, and strike like a thunder-bolt’—she exclaimed suddenly, her voice breaking under its weight of passion. Then it sank to a whisper :—

‘All yesterday it was in my mind. I dreaded to go last night. I prayed him not to take me; but he forced me. He said I was mad. . . . And I dressed—you know. And in the glass, it seemed to me like the face and the dress of a murderess. . . . After I was dressed, I took out the dagger—I had kept it hidden away ever since we landed in England—for I was afraid of it. He gave it to me, one day in America. It has a jewelled handle; and it is sharp and deadly—it is like a live

thing. I shudder at it. I've tried to lose it—to fling it into the water, or out of the windows of railway carriages; but it clung to my hand; it seemed alive. . . . And when I was looking at it and thinking—he came in; and I thrust it away. But it was before me all the time—all the time, in the carriage. And when we were going down the steps, with all those people looking, I kept seeing the picture between my eyes and theirs—that picture of her and me. . . . She at her easel painting and singing—don't you know how she sings in snatches—and tossing back her hair while she looked at her work: and I, creeping into the studio by the garden door, and under the gallery, where the tapestry makes a dark passage—creeping so softly that she could not hear a sound; and coming close—close—with the dagger raised——'

'Good God!' ejaculated Graysett, rising

to his feet, shaken out of self-control by the fearful vividness with which she pictured the scene. 'This is too horrible!'

The words escaped him unawares. He stood gazing at her in anguish, his eyes big and smarting with tears. The rush of thoughts which crowded into his mind, seemed thrust back again by grim despair, leaving him helpless. What could he do? Of what avail were his feeble efforts at consolation, to still a convulsion such as this? Every suggestion that rose to his lips died there, stifled by the overwhelming difficulties which pressed upon him. To rescue this poor distraught creature seemed the work of the physician rather than of the lover. He felt like a man standing powerless on high ground watching a storm-beaten vessel founder on the rocks. How could he urge her to confess her murderous impulse to her husband, or condemn her to any course which



would obviously lead to her being placed under restraint. Again, at such a crisis, action was imperatively necessary. Instantaneously, he remembered a case he had heard of, in which the avowal of homicidal impulse, unheeded, had preluded the commission of crime. A blank gulf of horrible possibilities yawned before him. He staggered and grew dizzy. . . . And then, as by a lightning flash, he saw himself bearing her away in his arms to an unknown but hopeful future; devoting every energy, every emotion of which he was capable, to the task of preserving her from danger, and restoring her to health and sanity. He saw himself battling with the phantoms which tortured her, and shedding peace and purity upon her vexed soul: his love her shield against the powers of evil, and an antidote to the baleful influence which had blighted her body and mind.

This, he thought, was the meaning of his prophetic vision ; this, the mission he was charged to fulfil. He might save her, at a cost terrible to contemplate, but which he must not pause to count. If higher law demanded that conventional law should be violated, let them await judgment at that loftier tribunal, and defy the anathemas hurled at them by the world. Here lay the prospect of her release ; it was for him to break her chains.

Swiftly, schemes shaped themselves ; and dim outlines became clear ; but, in the tumult of his being, it was impossible to commit himself in words. He walked a few paces from her, and his impulse translating itself into gesture, he flung open the jalousies, letting in a flood of soft evening light, and a gush of the balmy summer air. She had been sitting motionless since his outbreak of horror : it had subdued her, or her strength was spent. Now,

his movement roused her. She looked towards him with wild but timid entreaty, and spoke in piteous accents.

‘You see,’ she said, ‘I have told you what is true. How should I make you understand if I did not tell you the truth? And you cannot bear it—you are afraid!’

Still he did not answer. His mind, straining onward in far-reaching vision, was hardly pierced by her reproach. In his fervour of devotion there was not room for the idea that she might believe herself forsaken by him. He let her go on quaveringly.

‘Do not be afraid. It has passed by me now; I could not have told you, if it were not over. It will not come again—for days, perhaps. But then,’ and again her tones sank to tragic intensity, ‘what shall I do when it comes? What *can* I do? Who will help me and hold me back? There’s no one—I am

quite alone. I can trust no one but you. And if you leave me—if it becomes stronger than I—and I am led on. . . . And if you turn from me——’

He had come back to her, and stood beside her chair, realising with a pang that she had misunderstood his silence.

‘I will never leave you,’ he said. ‘I love you, and my love cannot fail you. If I seemed to turn from you now, it was not because I was afraid of any burden you might lay upon me. I want to take up all your burdens, if you will trust me. It was because all natural ways of escape seemed so beset with obstacles; and might bring you to perhaps even worse suffering, if that could be possible——’

‘I understand,’ she interrupted; ‘I know. I have gone over it all in my mind at times when I have been able to reason. There have been such times; but always, in the back-

ground, there was the horror. I knew it would come back. I wanted to prevent myself from yielding to it. I have read about people who have had feelings like mine—mad people. And I knew they would say I was mad, and lock me up. That is what you meant?’

He hesitated for a moment, while he sat down again beside her. ‘It is a danger to be feared,’ he answered slowly.

‘I am not mad,’ she said quietly. ‘I was mad when I thought Esmé loved me, but I am not mad now.’

There was a brief, painful pause, then he said falteringly, ‘You have considered? Other courses have suggested themselves to you?’

‘I have thought of ways. I have thought of how I would go away from him. I would leave him my money. That is what he married

me for, and he should have it—all—all. I would take my hatred with me, and lock it in my heart, and try to live another life. But that would be of no use. It would get outside of me, and drag me back. That's what my feeling is. I hate him; and yet I'm a part of him. I loathe him as I loathe my bad self; and yet I love him as I love my own flesh. Do you understand? Last night, when I saw Madame Tamvaco sitting there, and reading me through and through, I knew that she heard the evil thing whispering, "The time is coming"; and that she saw the picture which was before my eyes—between them and everything else. It came to me like a flash then, that she who is so strong might be strong enough to deliver me. I had a wild fancy that she might, if she would, seize me and drag me away—away from everything, and cleanse and heal me. But you heard her words . . .

And then, when he came into the room I knew that there was no hope. I was forced to rise and go to him.'

Her voice failed; and she leaned back in her chair with wan face and eyelids closed. So white and still was she, that he feared for a moment she had fainted. But she opened her eyes again and looked at him with her wide gaze, which questioned him so despairingly.

'Judith,' he said, meeting her eyes full, and speaking incisively, and with the deliberate intonation which subtly conveys both doubt and conviction, 'I have something strange to say to you. There is a means of escape. I think it is the only one. When I tell you what it is, you may be shocked and repelled. But when you understand me aright, your reason will convince you that it is the only sure way in which you can be delivered from

your husband's influence, and from all those terrible desires.'

He paused. Her eyes still sought his, but less despairingly. 'I—don't know—What way?'

'You spoke of being dragged by force—from yourself—from everything which makes your present unhappiness—of being cleansed and healed. I do not think that this can be done by Madame Tamvaco; though, I believe, I feel sure, she may be of service to you. I believe the instinct which causes you to turn to her is to be trusted. She is a strange, impressive woman. She may have wonderful gifts. I don't know. I have no means of estimating her will or her power to help you. But it does not seem to me that she, unaided, can wrench you from your present life. There is only one way of doing that. It would be like death. It would be an ordeal, the worst



almost for a woman. Do you comprehend me? The prisoner who escapes from his prison places himself under a ban. That is the price he pays for his freedom. You are a married woman; and you are a prisoner, bound by the law. There's no appeal for you. Society does not recognise such a case as yours. You must free yourself from the jurisdiction of the law. You must do, or seem to do, that which will divorce you from your husband. Do you understand? No one can help you but a man who loves you so purely and devotedly that, while he asks nothing from you but your trust, he takes the right to be your champion, your defender, against the world, against your husband, against your worse foes, which are in yourself. Judith, do you know what I mean? Do you trust me?'

There was a slight quivering of her eye-

lids ; and a faint blush rising to her cheeks—a little while ago so like marble—told him that she understood him. But her eyes were still wide and piteous as she answered brokenly—

‘I have no one but you. Whom else should I trust? I said long ago that if you were strong enough——’

‘I *will* be strong enough. I *am* strong enough. I might have taken you from him then—if I had been near you—if Fate had not been against me. I loved you then. I love you now. The love is the same, though all the circumstances are changed. You are the same ; for you love me at this moment no more than you loved me then. I’m glad. It makes the—the ordeal easier. I only want you to trust me. . . . There’s no holier affinity in life or after death than the pure love of two hearts. That can’t be for us. And I will have nothing less. So, do you

understand? There should be nothing, and yet everything. For is not such love as mine such faith as you'd give me—everything?’

She uttered a little cry, and rose to her feet, stretching forth her hands to him with a gesture of complete self-surrender, a gesture which said unmistakably, ‘Do with me what you will.’

So he interpreted it, though no word was spoken. He took her hands in his; then, bending forward, kissed her gravely on the forehead. It was the seal of a solemn obligation. It was the outward dedication of his life to a task which he knew might be humanly almost impossible. He did not shrink from it; but he foresaw with prophetic distinctness, difficulties well-nigh insurmountable. He drew a deep sigh of pain. His inward gaze towards the troubled future was clear and steadfast; no passion obscured it. His mind was able to

grasp practical exigencies; and there was a certain relief, after the strain upon his emotions, in unravelling perplexities, and in rapidly sketching a vague plan of operations. The burden of his responsibility was greater than could be borne without the stimulus of action. His position seemed so unnatural that he longed to assure himself of its reality by grappling with definite detail.

Judith uttered no protest, asked no question. Her dumb acceptance of his momentous proposal brought home to him, as no words could have done, her utter helplessness, the bewilderment of her faculties, and her incapability of resistance to the influence which was at the moment dominant.

And yet, while this very helplessness strengthened his resolve, and spurred him to more intense self-devotion, the doubt quivered through him, whether he were justified in.

committing her irrevocably to a course of action of which she hardly comprehended the full import.

‘Judith,’ he said, ‘you know to what you are consenting. You are separating yourself for ever from your husband. You are going to leave England. You are giving your life up to me.’

She made an acquiescent movement but did not speak. He was smitten with compassion. She looked so worn and weak.

‘I will leave you now. You are weary and need rest. Can you rest? Are you safe? Shall you be afraid to be alone now that you know that my whole heart is with you, and that your life is my care?’

‘I am not afraid,’ she murmured. ‘I am very tired. I think that I could sleep; and then I should be ready to do what you wished.’

‘ You will think of all that I have said ; and I will come again to-morrow at five. Then you will tell me your decision.’

‘ It is for you to do what you will—what you can,’ she replied submissively.

Her voice sent a chill through him ; and the unnaturalness of the situation, the mockery of his position, struck him with new force.

He led her to the couch beneath the window, and, arranging the pillows for her head, laid her there with the utmost tenderness. Her eyes closed, and she sank to slumber like a tired child. As she lay there, with her strange hued, gleaming draperies massed round her, she reminded him of a gorgeous tropical lily felled by a storm. The breeze entered, ruffling her hair, and stirring the lace on her breast. Her thin hands were folded one above the other, the rings falling loosely. Her poor wan face looked peaceful and sweet, though

in its quietude the signs of alteration appeared more marked ; and the dark hollows round her eyes, the transparent temples, the sharpened outlines and depressions in the cheeks, told too plainly of the havoc which mental and bodily suffering had wrought.

## CHAPTER XXII.

ON leaving Judith, late as it was, Graysett drove straight to the address of Madame Tamvaco.

The Sybil's abode seemed singularly out of harmony with herself and her reputation. There was nothing sinister or suggestive of mystery in the semi-suburban terrace, with its air of middle-class respectability, its mean portico, its conventional bay windows, framed by hangings of dull moreen, where one naturally expected to see the usual flowerpot of crude design and colouring, enfolding an etiolated india-rubber plant, or mangy fern.

The blinds of the lower windows were drawn, and Graysett was thus partially pre-



pared for the announcement, made by the Hindoo servant who answered his summons, that Madame Tamvaco was out of town, and would not return till the following afternoon. Graysett inquired for Mrs. Edye; but she also was absent. 'The Sahib Balàji might however be visible,' added the Hindoo; and at that moment an inner door opened, and an Oriental gentleman, slender, supple, and comparatively youthful, with long, black, curling hair, clear olive skin, finely cut features, and full, luminous eyes, appeared in the passage.

He wore a sort of tunic of dark velvet reaching below his knees, which seemed to aim at the combination of an admirable distinctiveness with that unobtrusiveness so desirable to the stranger in London. From his appearance, his scholarly air, and the remarkably good English in which he inquired whether he could be of any service in deliver-

ing a message to Madame Tamvaco, Graysett judged him to be a Hindoo of high caste, probably a Brahmin, educated in one of the Universities and an aspirant to the honours of punditship.

He confirmed the servant's information. Madame Tamvaco would not be in London till three o'clock on the morrow, when she would hold her weekly reception, previous to which she had promised an interview to some members of an association for the purpose of psychical research. The Oriental gentleman suggested that if Graysett wished for any private conversation with Madame Tamvaco, he should present himself punctually at three, and take advantage of a possible opportunity of finding her disengaged. Such opportunities, he added, were rare; and upon a leading question from Graysett, remarked that Madame Tamvaco was deeply occupied in directing the

operations of the Society, on the astral plane. He went on to say that the Western mind had displayed an unexpected attitude of receptivity, and that the development already clearly traceable among Europeans, gave great hopes of spiritual advancement. Now, German metaphysics had made a stand against materialism, and the opportunity must not be lost.

At any other time, so mysterious an announcement would have excited Graysett's curiosity ; and he might have found an interest in interrogating this occult personage upon the stupendous cosmogonical operations in which Madame Tamvaco appeared concerned ; also in gleaning particulars as to the tenets of the sect she represented in London. But his inward preoccupation allowed play to but one round of thoughts. He was in no mood to take an outsider's humorous view of a situation in which he himself was so deeply involved ; but

which indeed seemed to have gathered, as it were, and focussed the contrasting elements of pathos and farce, mystery and vulgar sensationalism, enthusiasm and flippant intrigue, passion and frivolity, refined comedy and grim, stark tragedy—these and many more, which seethe beneath the waves, and rise like foam upon the surface of modern society.

He courteously acquiesced with the Hindoo's suggestion, and withdrew, rattling home to his chambers in his hansom, his brain in a tumult, minutes swelling in his imagination to hours, scenes flitting before him, and facts and fancies grotesquely blending as in the confused sensations of a man under the influence of hashisch.

He spent the evening in writing business letters, studying railway routes, arranging plans, and providing against possible emergencies.

In the morning he drove to the temporary

residence of a French physician, celebrated for his treatment of mental disorders, who was now seeing patients for a few weeks in London. Graysett had consulted him upon the subject of his own health sometime previously, and, a few evenings before, had unprofessionally renewed the acquaintanceship at the house of a friend.

He had to wait a long time for an audience. When at last he was shown into the great man's study, he found himself confronted, for the first time, by the real difficulties of his paradoxical position.

He had come to consult this man as to the sanity of an absent woman, whose name he could not give, with whom he was unconnected by any tie of relationship, the details of whose case he knew only from his own intuition and her fragmentary revelations—a case involving complications of so delicate a nature that to

place it in any way clearly before the physician seemed an impossibility. A moment's reflection, a look into the depths of those keen-sighted eyes made him decide to trust their owner. He determined to be absolutely explicit and to suppress only two facts—the identity of Judith, and his own relations towards her as her lover and would-be abductor.

Graysett told Judith's story in full detail, prefacing it with a guarded apology for his own unconventional course of proceeding, which the physician received, forming his conclusions in silence. Dr. Dupas was at once a man of the world and an enthusiast in his profession, possessing an extraordinary insight into human character and motive, but priding himself upon a superiority to prejudice, both social and scientific. He listened attentively, every now and then interrupting the narrator with a request for more detailed information upon

some particular point which struck him, asking many questions—some apparently irrelevant, others with a direct medical bearing, and carefully noting down the replies.

From his own knowledge and all that the Rainshaws had told him, Graysett was able to give a fairly accurate *résumé* of Judith's history—her hereditary predisposition, her uncared-for girlhood, her tendency towards the mystical, her curious idiosyncrasies, the little traits of temperament which he had observed during the first days of his intimacy with her, her extraordinary attraction towards Esmé Colquhoun, and the circumstances attending their first meeting—her susceptibility to his magnetism, and the shock which her nervous system had sustained upon the occasion which Mrs. Rainshaw had described, when Esmé had first exerted his influence, the subsequent change in her, and her marriage—all these

facts he related as they had unfolded themselves to him, and finally recounted minutely the events which had taken place at Mrs. Borlase's reception, and the awful revelation as to her mental state, which Judith had made the day before. He then briefly asked Dr. Dupas' opinion.

The physician did not make an immediate reply. 'It is clear to me,' he said at last, 'that there are complications of a private nature into which you are unwilling or unable to enter. It is impossible for me to speak with authority unless I see the lady in question.'

'That is not practicable at present—in London. I wish that it were so,' replied Graysett. 'But if, as I understand, you are returning to Paris in the course of a few days, a formal consultation might take place there. Frankly, your voice cannot affect the immediate line of action which has been determined upon. I



ask your opinion for my own satisfaction—upon what you may consider a hypothetical case. By giving it, you can be in no way prejudiced professionally.’

Dr. Dupas smiled in an enigmatic manner. ‘I will give it,’ he said, ‘on that understanding. Major Graysett, I think that I comprehend your position and that of this hypothetical lady more clearly than you perhaps imagine. Such a case is unfortunately not unique in my experience. To judge it from a conventional standpoint would be an absurdity. I have nothing to do with ethical considerations, or with your private affairs. If you ask me whether a man is justified in breaking a social law in order that he may save one dear to him from certain misery, I reply that a man is justified in doing anything he pleases, provided that his action is calculated to produce more happiness than pain, and that his individual obligations are not

violated. There is no such thing as abstract morality ; and I would paraphrase the precept, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." But that is beside the mark. I am a physician, not a priest. You ask my opinion upon certain facts and symptoms. Briefly : All that you relate makes me fear the existence of epileptic mania, of that degree of intensity which we describe as the *petit mal*, complicated by hereditary tendency. You look startled ; but I need not remind you that the terrible seizures with which epilepsy is usually associated, constitute but one form of the malady. It may manifest itself in numberless subtle phases, and may attack the moral and mental faculties, producing a train of most interesting psychical phenomena unaccompanied by any distressing physical symptoms. It may indeed, in the first stages, be allied with an extraordinary vividness of imagination

and intellectual capacity of a high order. I note all the morbid traits you mention in the early period—variableness of mood, concentration of the thoughts upon abnormal subjects, extreme nervous susceptibility, semi-religious exaltation, and slight attacks of vertigo, taking place at night, or of such brief duration as to cause no uneasiness.

‘ For example—the partial ecstasy and dual consciousness experienced by your friend at her first interview with the man who had already disturbed her emotional balance; and again at the mesmeric *séance*—the acute pain at the heart, the apparent fainting fits, the subsequent dreaminess and confusion of ideas—are all significant. Marriage and its consequent physical and emotive agitation would have accelerated the disease of which I now trace the process distinctly. The indications are clear, vague as must necessarily be the patient’s own account of

her state—the sort of divided existence of which she is conscious, her confused impressions resembling the recollection of a terrible dream, the lapses of memory and occasional hebetude, the aimless desire for movement, the increasing powerlessness of the will, before the pressure of an imaginary fatality ; the belief in demoniacal possession, and the alternating fits of sensuous satisfaction with life, and of unspeakable gloom—the impulse towards, and terror of, some criminal act, recurring at stated intervals—these are marked characteristics of this form of mania. They are warnings which demand the gravest consideration. . . .

‘Is the disease curable? You beg me to be absolutely frank, but without more than my present knowledge, I can commit myself to no statement. Cases of complete restoration are rare. It is possible to modify the disease, and to procure such long intervals between

the attacks that a truce may be accepted as peace.

‘In such a case as you have described, the only hope of radical improvement lies, according to my judgment, in complete and immediate change of scene ; in the entire breaking up of the existing conditions of life ; in the removal of all exciting causes ; and in soothing moral influence, combined with medical treatment and high, bracing air. It is impossible to estimate the effect of such measures. I have known instances in which they have speedily produced a beneficial result.’

Graysett’s anxious questioning elicited no more definite, or detailed expression of opinion. The interview had been a long one ; and Dr. Dupas politely drew it to a close.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE clock had hardly struck three when Graysett drew up at Madame Tamvaco's door. To his disappointment he saw a brougham standing there, and a hansom just driving away. The Seeress had evidently other impatient devotees.

The Indian servant admitted him ; and he was ushered through a second door further along the passage into a double sitting-room on the ground floor, where several people had already assembled.

Madame Tamvaco was seated in a large cane arm-chair placed in the draught of two windows. She was reading a newspaper, and fanning herself in an agitated manner, every

now and then glancing up, as she delivered a volley of ejaculations in a language unknown to Graysett. She suspended the rapid swaying of her fan, to nod to him, and motion him to a chair.

The Sybil appeared even smaller and more shrivelled, and her fine face, with its deep dark eyes looking forth from the folds of black lace which veiled her head, was in a still more marked degree inappropriate to her ungoddess-like form.

She looked tired, ill, and much older than when he had viewed her in the rosy light of Mrs. Borlase's studio. He thought now that she might be any age from fifty upwards. It was evident that she was in a state of nervous exasperation. She tapped her foot with a kind of repressed impatience. Her features changed their expression every instant, and were certainly not now distinguished by the serene

dignity they had worn when in repose. Her voice was harsh and its foreign accent more noticeable. Graysett decided that her moods were as variable as her physiognomy.

She was the centre of a little knot of scientific-looking gentlemen. These she began to introduce with a comprehensive wave of her fan. 'Professor Dowsett, Professor Woakes, Professor Borrodaile.' Then one or two others were shown in, and, in the confusion of greetings, no notice was taken of Graysett by the Professors who seemed much intent upon their own business. Professor Dowsett, small, alert, with a note-book open in his hand, rushed up to the American Professor whom Graysett had seen at Mrs. Borlase's party, and inquired in an eager aside, 'Have you had any phenomena?' proceeding to make a note of the reply, which appeared to involve some explanation. A lecture seemed to be going on in the



front drawing-room, which was screened from the other by a partially drawn curtain.

Hither Graysett turned. Some ten or twelve persons, men and women, were gathered round a foreigner—not the Hindoo student of yesterday, but a Persian, Greek, or Italian—it would have been difficult to decide his nationality—in plain English dress, with an agreeable bearing, and a singularly vivid, intelligent face. Graysett caught the words uttered in a low, finely modulated voice, ‘The astral body thus projected, transcends the limitations of sense. It is not trammelled by the ordinary conditions of existence. It assimilates knowledge without effort. It can pass through material obstacles’—when Margrave, who was standing in the circle, perceiving his friend, moved out of it, and said in his dry, neutral tone—

‘You will not imbibe any wisdom from the

fountain head to-day, if that is what you have come for. Here is your Gamaliel. The ladies prefer his eloquence to that of Madame Tamvaco.'

'Who is he?' asked Graysett.

'A Chela—as they term it, or student of occultism. He is a native of the Ionian Isles, I believe, but hails immediately from Northern India, where he has been under the tutelage of an adept. He has been explaining the scientific process by which Apollonius of Tyana separated his astral body from his physical one, and was enabled to be in two places at once. Have you come from the inner circle? The Sibyl was in good form the other day, and rang some astral bells greatly to the edification of Professor Dowsett, who has brought his brother professors of the 'Psychological Investigation' department to make a report. But the old lady is in a singularly impracticable

mood to-day. She will neither work wonders, nor expound doctrine. She has an indigestion, and the papers have been making fun of her.'

'Surely a Sibyl should be above these weaknesses,' said Graysett, with a strained attempt to enter into his companion's mood.

'Sibyls are women,' drily remarked Margrave. 'And then the theory of incarnations accounts for all inconsistencies. Accidents will happen you know, even in so serious a business; and as it is to be seen that our Prophetess labours under disabilities—shall we say of temperament?—the suppositions are, either that the spiritual monad made a bad shot, so to speak, or that the ethereal and material affinities haven't kept pace with each other in the round of incarnations. Don't you see? A philosophy which provides satisfactorily for all contingencies, commends itself to the latitudi-

narian mind ; and I am travelling back to my old first principle that the soul and the digestion are one.'

'Why do you come here?' asked Graysett.

'For instruction and amusement,' promptly replied Margrave. 'History informs us that once certain persons had the power of getting out of their bodies ; and I should be glad to assist in reviving a lost art. Moreover, it appears to me that astral travelling must be an agreeable and convenient mode of locomotion. I am told that there is a Psychical College in America, where the process may be learned upon the payment of twenty guineas. Here I am taught for nothing. 'Embrace opportunities,' is one of my ruling maxims. But I candidly own that I am puzzled by the small practical use which these people seem to make of their astral bodies. Why, for instance, doesn't Madame Tamvaco take an

immediate flight to the moon, where one presumes that there are no society journals ? ’

Some fashionable friends of Mr. Margrave’s entered and diverted his attention—a Belgravian dowager, with an eyeglass, and two æsthetically dressed daughters. They were followed by others, mostly ladies, and of all types, from smartly dressed London beauties, to spectacled advocates of woman’s rights, emancipated spinsters, and ecstatic-looking spiritualists. To all of these, the handsome Greek, Chela, appeared an object of deep interest.

Graysett looked about for Mrs. Edye, but could not discover if she were present. The buzz of conversation increased ; and above it rose the exquisitely modulated tones of the Chela, who was guardedly replying to a pointed question from Margrave’s friend, the dowager. ‘ The Western mind, Madame, must be gradu-

ally prepared for the reception of the highest truth. There are many secrets which the Great Masters do not permit us to divulge to the superficial inquirer, or to those who are still in bondage to superstition.'

The dowager dropped her eyeglass, through which she had been scrutinising the Chela, and turning to Margrave, said in a *sotto voce*, audible to Graysett, 'Really, Mr. Margrave, it is too bad to bring us to this distant suburb and put us off in that way. I thought we were to see the genuine article in a turban, straight from Thibet;' while an elderly lady of massive proportions and inflexible aspect, broke in—

'Oh, I have got beyond Christianity, if that is what you mean. I'm ready for a new revelation; and all that, about cyclic evolution, and the planetary chain, seems to me very scientific. But what I can't understand is, how

the Life Impulse is to be conveyed from one planet to another. If you will explain that to me I am ready to believe all the rest.'

The Greek put his flexible hands together, turning the points of his fingers backwards, and directed a searching glance into space.

'How does thought travel?' he asked dreamily. 'How does knowledge travel? How is it that a seer in London can in his trance witness a scene which is at that moment taking place in Birmingham? Knowledge comes, not by reason but by inspiration. How is it that Goethe, the most unscientific of thinkers as regards method, divined the truth concerning the structure of plants? You Westerns have stifled inspiration by your process of induction. The Aristotelian method has been the curse of Western Thought.'

'Yes, yes,' twittered a thin, bird-like young woman, with her head upon one side, and a

bunch of grass nodding on her bonnet. 'That terrible Aristotelian method!'

Graysett moved back to the inner room where Madame Tamvaco still sat, the centre of her little knot of scientists, but on its threshold he was accosted by the American Professor, who inquired in the tone of one yearning to discover a kindred soul—

'You are going in for this? You are a student—a chela?'

'Oh, no!' said Graysett; 'nothing so advanced.'

'A spiritualist, perhaps?'

'No,' said Graysett again, quoting Margrave with a bewildered feeling that he was dreaming vividly; 'I come here for instruction and amusement.'

'And I,' said the Professor, sitting down, while he motioned Graysett to a chair by his side, 'I come here in search of a faith. Well,



now!’ he went on, leaning forward with that queer mixture of earnestness and dryness—an American characteristic, ‘I’ve tried everything; and if these New Pythagoreans give me what I want, I’m a happy being. The doctrine promises well, I will say that. It appeals to the intellect. Now, I’m a scientific man. I may say that I’m one of the leaders of the scientific school over with us. I used to be the associate of Tyndall and Huxley, mentally you understand. Protoplasm, and uncreated and unvivified matter, that was my theory, till I began to investigate the phenomena of spiritualism. Protoplasm and ghosts don’t pull together. I believe in ghosts. I’ve seen thousands of ’em. I have talked to them. I may say that I’ve kissed them. They upset my creed. What was I to do? Protoplasm on one side, modern Christianity on the other. I can’t swallow that, holus bolus with a gulp and a wry face. I’m tossed on the horns

of these two dilemmas. Materialism won't do. Modern Christianity won't do. The first denies that I have got a soul at all; the second gives me a soul but denies me the management of it. These New Pythagoreans let me have the bringing up of my soul; and that's something gained. As for their scheme of cosmogony, they tell me it is based on exact science—occult science you know. I'm all science myself, and I shall pretty soon see how far that assertion is to be depended upon.'

The American once launched was not to be lightly arrested. Graysett listened and looked on, forcing phrases and details upon his attention, after the manner in which a drunken man tries to convince himself that he is sober.

His faculties and emotions had been so strained during the last twenty-four hours, that they were incapable, for the moment, of sustaining any further burden. His deeper conscious-

ness seemed stunned; and his mind was a chaos of grotesque and ghastly fancies. He laughed to himself with a grim appreciation of that jumble of the tragic and the ridiculous which the situation presented, and which indeed is apparent to the humourist in all phases of life. He had come with quickened pulses, and an exciting if unreasonable hope, that some spiritual light might be thrown upon his own and Judith's destiny. But now, inspiration seemed bathos, and Madame Tamvaco a very ineffective link with the supra-mundane sphere.

She had thrown herself back in her chair, and was rolling up cigarettes with nervous energy. The three professors maintained their position near her, notwithstanding the pressure of new comers. Professor Borrodaile, a stolid-looking person with a heavy beard, a massive brow and distinctly contemptuous air, sat at one side of her chair, silent and sceptical, but

with eyes and ears alert. Professor Woakes, lean, Carlylesque in countenance, cavernous about the eyes, and hollow of voice, seemed aiming at an attitude of judicial impartiality. Professor Dowsett, the showman as it seemed, looked uneasy and conscious of responsibility. He cast deprecatory glances at his colleagues, while in persuasive accents he urged his request. 'Madame, will you not do something for Dr. Borrodaile? It would be so very satisfactory if you would give him a proof of the reality of occult phenomena.'

'What do you take me for?' cried Madame Tamvaco. 'Am I a juggler? Did you expect that I would make cups and saucers, and give a manifestation of electric bells in all your pockets? I cannot do it. I am ill. I am worn out and ill-used. It's time that I disintegrated. I can tell you the world is not a pleasant place to live in when people write lies about you. . . . Now

listen ; I have devoted my life to a search for Truth. I, weak woman, weighted by bodily infirmities, less worthy than many of you here, to be an instrument for the service of Humanity, I frankly tell you that I have clamoured till the door has been opened to me. I come forth to do my people good. What then? What do they call me? The Champion Impostor of Christendom. Oh, you Christendom ! you are worse than the wolves. They only eat one of themselves when he has been killed by others. But you—you kill a man first and then you devour him.'

A faint smile played over the impassive features of Professor Borrodaile, and Professor Dowsett burst forth in eager protest.

'Upon my word, I am very good to you gentlemen,' continued Madame Tamvaco fiercely. 'You come here to question me ; and I answer your questions, while all the time you call me

to yourselves a cheat and an impostor. I am not angry at that. But when you say my Masters are a fraud, my blood boils. I cannot bear it. Attack me if you will; but do not blaspheme against that which is sacred. Respect the faith of millions. Respect those mighty ones who tread in the fourth path of holiness; for *they* are holy.'

As her enthusiasm intensified, her voice became sweet and bell-like, and the changes which took place in the countenance of this remarkable woman were astonishing in their rapidity and variety. They resembled the play of lightning upon a landscape which alternates between sullen gloom and dazzling splendour. She took a cigarette from the heap which she had been accumulating, lighted it, and after a few whiffs, began to question Professor Woakes in a composed, candid manner, about certain experiments he had been conducting, on the

effect of the electro-magnet upon the human body.

A card was brought to her by the Indian servant. She glanced at it, and her face grew dark. 'Esmé Colquhoun!' she exclaimed. 'What does he want with me? I am not æsthetic, I will not see him;' and resumed her conversation.

Presently another carriage rolled up; and a contralto, foreign voice, sounded in the hall. Madame Tamvaco started up radiant as a child, and crying, 'It is Princess Balzani; she must come in;' called out a greeting in Italian through the half-open door.

The group of scientists dispersed a little, and an interested glance was directed by even stolid Professor Borrodaile, towards the lady who entered—evidently no insignificant personage.

Princess Balzani had the reputation of

being able to influence the destinies of Europe. In person she was modelled upon the accepted type of female diplomatist. She was slender and supple. She looked inscrutable. One felt that the fall of her draperies concealed momentous secrets. She had velvety black eyes, a creamy skin, and golden hair. Her features were irregular, but their play of expression suggested volumes of interpretation. It was said of her that she was wily as the serpent, innocent as the dove. It was known of her that she was a generous friend and a bitter enemy. Her appearance at Madame Tamvaco's reception was significant. Had it not been hinted that the doctrine of the New Pythagoreans cloaked a scheme of deep political import?

Princess Balzani advanced, and embraced the Seeress with that mingled grace and impetuosity of which no Englishwoman becomes



the mistress. This lady was absolutely without self-consciousness, or so supremely self-conscious that her abundant gesticulation was perfectly natural and effective.

The two spoke together for a few moments in the same language as before. Then Madame Tamvaco took up from a table near her, the paper she had been reading, and pointed out a paragraph to her friend. The Princess sat down and read, smiling serenely.

‘But it is not true,’ said she in English, with her sweet foreign pronunciation. ‘There were no revelations. I did not give any letters, and I did write to the *Neue Freie Presse*, to say that. I cannot say more.’

‘You should bring a lawsuit, Princess,’ grimly remarked Professor Woakes.

‘Oh!’ said she, looking up and smiling in her peculiarly engaging manner, ‘it is so little matter. I am so indifferent.’

‘Why do you not join us, and devote your talents to the highest science?’ cried Madame Tamvaco. ‘Your politics are beneath you. Do you know, gentlemen, the secret of Princess Balzani’s influence? She has the most lovely voice in all the world. It is for her voice that the statesmen listen to her.’

‘Ah, you do speak to humiliate me,’ said the Princess with her liquid laugh. ‘They do listen to me, because I say what is worth listening to.’

‘Princess Balzani is a stateswoman herself,’ gallantly murmured Professor Dowsett; while the American Professor broke in with repressed impatience—

‘And now, Madame Tamvaco, are we to have no phenomena? not even a precipitation—a portrait produced without contact with the pencil? It is a promise.’

‘No,’ exclaimed Madame Tamvaco. ‘I

have said before, I am not a conjurer. My Professor, I will keep my promise ; but another time ; not for these gentlemen who have brought their note-books, and who will go from me to Errington the medium, and say which is the greatest cheat. Errington is not a cheat ;' and she tightened her lips and shook her head. 'That I will tell you, though I do not like mediums. I have shown Professor Dowsett some phenomena ; and that is not enough. Here is Professor—what is your name ? Boro—Borrodaile. He is a sceptic. He is a disciple of your Huxley. He will not give to anyone but himself and his Huxley the right to think. Come nearer,' she added, turning abruptly to Princess Balzani, 'you have more brains than them all. Come and talk.'

'Mais j'aime tant écouter,' pleaded Princess Balzani.

‘Well, what can I do to convince you?’ exclaimed Madame Tamvaco, fiercely addressing Professor Borrodaile. ‘Would you believe if you had phenomena?’

‘I can’t say,’ replied Professor Borrodaile, still stolid, but with the slightest movement of his eyelid; ‘it would depend upon the conditions.’

‘Would you believe, if you saw me in my astral body?’

‘I cannot say. I must be quite satisfied first about what I had eaten for supper.’

Madame Tamvaco glared at him tragically.

‘Oh, Protoplasm! Protoplasm!’ she cried; ‘Huxley’s Protoplasm! Why, you are the most sceptical sceptic I ever beheld. You are a worse doubter than Thomas Didymus. I do assure you that you will go to the other extreme. That will be your fate. You will

become credulous. You will turn spiritualist when you are a little older.'

There was a general laugh, in which the Professor in question softly joined, but he said nothing.

'Why do you not speak?' cried Madame Tamvaco.

'J'aime tant écouter,' replied the Professor, parodying the Princess; 'I know that I am very barbarous.'

'Well,' said she again, leaning forward, do you believe in Errington's slate writing?'

'I cannot say.'

'Do you believe he is a charlatan?'

'I cannot say.'

'What do you believe?'

'In nothing as yet,' replied the Professor.  
'I am reserving my judgment.'

There was a pause. Professor Dowsett rose, preparatory to taking leave, and observed

that doubt was the scientific attitude. Professor Borrodaile did not move, but stroked his beard contemplatively. It was hoped that he was about to make a concession, but it was a long time coming. The American Professor was impatient for the Psychical Investigators to be gone, and whispered to Professor Dowsett, who was reluctantly putting up his note-book, 'I guess you'll get no phenomena to-day.'

'I admit,' said Professor Borrodaile, at last, 'that I am surprised. It is my impression—so far—that Errington is not a fraud. If I could be sure that the pencil wrote when the sound was produced, I should be disposed to accept other phenomena—as possible. At present there is no evidence to convince me that the dead have the power of communicating with the living, or that the spirit, if it exist, is capable of operating upon material bodies.'

‘It does not follow that because there are phenomena they are caused by dead people,’ said Madame Tamvaco. ‘There is an astral body, or there is not. If you admit the astral body which is invisible, you must admit that it can produce phenomena.’

The Professor again stroked his beard, and shook his head.

‘You are sure that you have got a body?’ sarcastically demanded Madame Tamvaco. ‘I can make you invisible to Professor Dowsett if you please; for I will magnetise him so that he cannot see you. Well, you will admit that you have a body, but you will not admit that you have a spirit.’

‘I have never experienced anything which could convince me that I have a spirit.’

Madame Tamvaco held up her arms with a gesture of despair. The Professor rose.

‘Oh, you scientists!’ cried she; ‘I will have

nothing to do with you. You have surrounded yourselves with an atmosphere so dense, that you cannot see through it. You are caught in your own trap. You are behind the march of science, not in advance of it. When are you going again to Errington?’

‘On Monday evening at eight o’clock.’

‘Very well, you shall see. Now, if you were convinced, you would not be honest enough to own it? You would be *chassé* from your society. Your fellow-scientists would shunt you. And you would not be honest, like Krookes and Wallace, for example? You would cling on to your old prejudices?’

‘Possibly. I do not know.’

‘Then, why will you not rise and make a rush for knowledge and grasp it?’

‘Because,’ said he, bidding her farewell, ‘I think it best to let knowledge come of itself, and find its own way.’



As the Professor departed, Mrs. Edye entered.

She was in walking-dress, and her height made her conspicuous. She gave a careless nod to one or two who had greeted her, and went straight to Graysett, standing before him and looking him through and through with her clear eyes.

‘You are in trouble,’ she began, then abruptly changed her tone; ‘we’ll talk about that presently. I have just come from a lecture.’

He made some inquiries with a faint simulation of interest.

‘Madame is going to talk to you by-and-by,’ she said absently, her gaze roving round the room, and resting for a moment close by, upon Madame Tamvaco and Princess Balzani, who were conversing earnestly. ‘You must wait a minute or two. . . . Yes, I liked the

lecture. It was in a very grand house. There were a lot of women there, and about six men, besides the one who talked. And I thought the whole thing extremely funny—a phase of British life. I am going to write an article on it when I get home. Think of a man getting a friend to lend him her parlour, and lecturing in it for his own benefit. My! fancy charging a dollar and a half for that! Why, you'd get the best lecturing possible for twenty-five cents in America!’

‘Was Balaji there?’ asked the American Professor. ‘When is he to be here? I have got some questions to ask him.’

‘Oh, Balaji is coming back presently,’ said Mrs. Edye. ‘I left him to sit it out. He didn’t much care for the lecture. There was a frown upon his brow. It was all about the beauty of wedded love, and meeting hereafter, and that kind of thing. It did not fit in with

Balaji's notions. My ! it was odd to see him there among the women ; not the right sort of thing for a chela vowed to celibacy.'

'It doesn't make much difference to these two whether they are in the company of women or men,' said Madame Tamvaco, interrupting her conversation with Princess Balzani for a moment. 'If it did, they'd very soon be ordered back to Thibet.'

'Well, it was funny,' continued Mrs. Edye, with her American laugh. 'Most of the old ladies were asleep ; and I was just trying to dissect them as they sat in front of me. I could see one right through, inside and all round her.' She paused. 'Major Graysett,' she said abruptly, and moved a little apart, 'you have got a patient for me. You need a doctor, on the occult plane.'

A sudden impulse moved Graysett. 'Heaven knows,' he said, 'I need a woman friend,

who will befriend another most unfortunate woman.'

'You want me. You want a doctor,' she repeated; 'a doctor like me. Why, certainly! I've made the disease you are interested in my peculiar study. That old Frenchman was right in his diagnosis; but he'll never get any further than that. Your physicians had better give up trying to tackle mental disease till their own inner eyes are opened. They can cut off your arms and legs, and cure a cold or the measles; but they aren't fit for much beyond. What has your vaunted science done in all these ages for incurable maladies, which the ancients believed, truly enough, were afflictions from the gods? It is we, the pioneers in spiritual magnetism, who are destined to make discoveries for which we shall earn the gratitude of the Race.'

'Tell me,' he asked, 'how do you know

of my trouble? Who has told you of her?’

‘I have seen her. I have heard her tell her wretched story. I was with you both yesterday. You believe in clairvoyance, don’t you? If you doubt, the proof lies within yourself, or else I am greatly mistaken. . . . That’s how I know. I was certain you’d come here to-day; and I guessed just how you’d feel. You have been looking round and thinking what a bubble it all is; and that we are a pack of self-deceived or fraudulent idiots. You have been blaming yourself for the impulse that brought you here. I dare say you have been wondering whether it isn’t all a solemn hoax. My!’ and she gave her mouth a queer little twist, ‘I should like to hoax some of *these* idiots who come to listen and to laugh, and to tell flippant dinner-table stories of our queer ways of going on. What do they

know of our real aims, our true aspirations? It's phenomena they want, and I'd give them a whole bureau-full if it would satisfy them. But that wouldn't be of any use. They'd never get, in this generation, any nearer to true wisdom. That's all I care about, Major Graysett. I've come over to Europe in search of it; and I'll go to Asia, if it is only to be found there. I want to help my fellow-creatures. I want to get at their souls through their bodies. When I saw that poor young thing for the first time the other evening, though I could not quite place her then, I said to myself, "There's a case for you." And I'm going to take charge of her, just right away—Madame Tamvaco and I have settled it all. You, she, and I will start off to-morrow, for a high mountain place I know of, and she shall be healed. I shall keep in the background, but you will know I'm there. You may trust me. You may

trust those who are mightier than I. Let the world say what it pleases. That's no business of mine. Society is a hypocrite. I like to cheat hypocrites. Major Graysett, I could see right into your heart yesterday. You are a true man. Just think it over, and make any arrangements that you like. I am ready.'

She ceased; and without waiting for an answering word—only giving him a strange little nod—flitted away into the crowd.

A few minutes later Graysett felt the touch of a hand upon his arm, and turning, saw that Madame Tamvaco was by his side. Again, the woman's whole demeanour had changed. Her face was grave, even sad; and her glorious eyes seemed to have borrowed the far-off lustre of the stars.

'Go,' she said very gently. 'Go to her whom you love. It is near the hour of your appointment.'

‘Madame?’ he exclaimed questioningly;  
‘you will help her? You will save her?’

‘She is saved,’ replied Madame Tamvaco  
solemnly. . . .



## CHAPTER XXIV.

THE fantastic, vaporous suggestion that through Madame Tamvaco's lips, Destiny might give forth her utterance, had drawn Esmé Colquhoun also within the magic circle of the Sibyl's presence.

Repulsed ; passion burning in him like living fire, and yet with his brain cool and steady to scheme and to will, he walked away from the door.

The carriage which contained Princess Balzani passed him. She kissed her hand to him. The flashing vision seemed a gleam from his heaven of sensuous ecstasy ; and the beauty of this foreign woman, a symbol of that heart-cherished loveliness there enshrined.

His brain revelled in alluring imagery. He was intoxicated with his poetic dreams. Their realisation seemed dimly foreshadowed. He felt himself a conqueror.

His private hansom had been slowly following him. He signed to the driver, and jumped in. 'To Baron's Gardens—Mrs. Borlase—and be quick.'

Christine's French maid knew him well. In days not so long back, her mistress's secret had been no secret to her. For Esmé Colquhoun, the forbidding edict set forth in the artist's firm writing, '*Engaged till six o'clock,*' had never been put into operation.

A few diplomatically worded inquiries elicited the information that Madame had no sitters that afternoon, that a model had been dismissed early, that Madame was weary, indisposed. She was resting upon her couch. But Monsieur Esmé Colquhoun had doubtless,

as formerly, the privilege of *entrée*. Madame should be informed.

‘On no account.’ Esmé was imperative. As Pauline was aware, Madame had always accorded him the honour of entering her presence without formal announcement. He would step softly into the studio, and, should Madame be reposing, would withdraw so noiselessly, that she could suffer no disturbance—and—a *douceur* did the rest.

Pauline ushered him into a drawing-room opening off the hall, which, notwithstanding the traces of Christine’s admirable taste shown in its furniture and decoration, had yet the look of stiffness an unused room must inevitably possess, and then closed the door behind her, leaving him alone.

He lingered for a minute or two in this ante-chamber, gloating on the marks of her handiwork, recalling tender associations, hug-

ging, as it were, his passionate delight, and, voluptuary-like, intensifying by voluntary delay, the divine thrills of anticipation. He passed into the conservatory, a mass of flowers and greenery, where two pyramids of roses in bloom guarded the veiled doorway that led into Christine's sanctuary. It was very silent here, and there was in the air the dreaminess that comes with heavy perfume. He could hear the bees murmuring, as they drowsily crawled out of the drooping yellow hearts; and a light breeze from the garden caused the heliotrope clusters, and the stooping passion flowers to whisper tenderly to each other.

Esmé stood in the gallery. His hand was laid upon the heavy folds of the inner curtain, and he shivered in the delicious suspense with which he waited for the sound of the step—of a falling brush—of a snatch of song, such as was wont to burst from her while she worked.

But there was no audible sign of her presence. He lifted the drapery and descended the steps to the studio. A large easel stood in the centre of the room, and upon it the unfinished portrait of his wife. Judith's face was the object upon which his eyes first rested. It seemed to project with startling vividness from the dark background, at which he saw that Christine had been working. The palette and mahl-stick lay upon the ground, as though they had been despairingly thrown aside ; and Christine herself, in weariness or perhaps in grief—for he fancied, as he approached and scanned her face, that a tear-drop was dry upon her cheek—had sunk down also, and had fallen asleep.

There was something inexpressibly touching in the unconscious *abandon* of her attitude. She was half sitting, half reclining, upon a broad, shallow sofa of the old-fashioned, high-

shouldered kind, her arms thrown back upon a pile of cushions and supporting her head, the chin turned upwards, the white throat showing, the mass of short curls crushed up against the pillows, and falling over her forehead.

Her bosom rose and fell, as her breath flowed, not in the regular undulations of happy slumber, but with agitation—a troubled-heaving; and now, as she faintly stirred, with a deep, sobbing sigh.

He came near, and stood over her, his eyes clinging to her, as though they could never have their fill.

He gazed and gazed, passion tearing at his heart, and his exaltation and resolve changing into black despair. For he knew, as he studied the pale, proud face of the sleeping woman, that, however defiant she might be of conventional obligations, there was in her nature an irresistible loyalty against which

his grosser love might never prevail—the loyalty to a woman friend; the loyalty to an ideal.

He clenched his hands in silent, impotent fury, and turned suddenly from her face to the face of his wife. His eyes dilated and darkened, shooting forth deadly gleams, till his countenance seemed for the moment transformed into that of a magnificent fiend. His form expanded and reared itself to its full height, as though he were gathering in superhuman strength. All the force of his soul, all the vital energy of his being, became concentrated in an intense passion of hate. ‘*Die!*’ said the inner voice, ‘*Die! Die!*’ and if thought were dynamic, the murderous will must have sped like destroying lightning to the accomplishment of its purpose.

As he gazed in fierce intentness at Judith’s face, the outlines of the picture faded and

were blurred ; and before him there seemed to rise a thick, dark mist, in which the form of Judith shaped itself, and swayed towards him and vanished. Fear came upon him ; and, in the reaction from his guilty desire, his limbs were like water, and great drops of sweat stood upon his forehead. He staggered blindly forward. The easel fell with a great crash, awakening Christine, who rose to her feet uttering a cry of terror. But without a word Esmé passed her, and left her presence.



## CHAPTER XXV.

IN strange irony of coincidence, Graysett also waited upon the threshold of his mistress's boudoir, for sound or token that should welcome him to his tryst.

This room, too, seemed very silent. The light was subdued. The perfume of dying roses filled the atmosphere.

Again there crept over him the clammy horror of his dream, icily gripping his throat, and turning him sick.

Again he seemed to hear the plaintive notes of the melody which had preluded his vision. There, at his feet, lay the bunch of withered roses ; upon a chair near him, a mantle Judith had worn. All the minute

details of his dream-chamber forced themselves upon him now, as then.

He felt cold and giddy. A mist rose before him, for a moment, blurring the scene ; and out of the mist, looked Esmé's face—Esmé's eyes dilated and glaring with murderous hate.

Then the dimness cleared, the image vanished. He moved dizzily forward to the window. A ray of sunlight entering through a rift in the closed venetians fell upon a mass of yellow drapery, a tense form bent backwards on the cushioned divan, an upturned face framed in golden-brown hair.

'Judith !' he cried ; and, falling upon his knees beside the couch, he bent over the prostrate form.

She had not swooned, for though the face was ashen pale, with a faint violet discolouration, the eyes were wide open, brilliant and prominent.

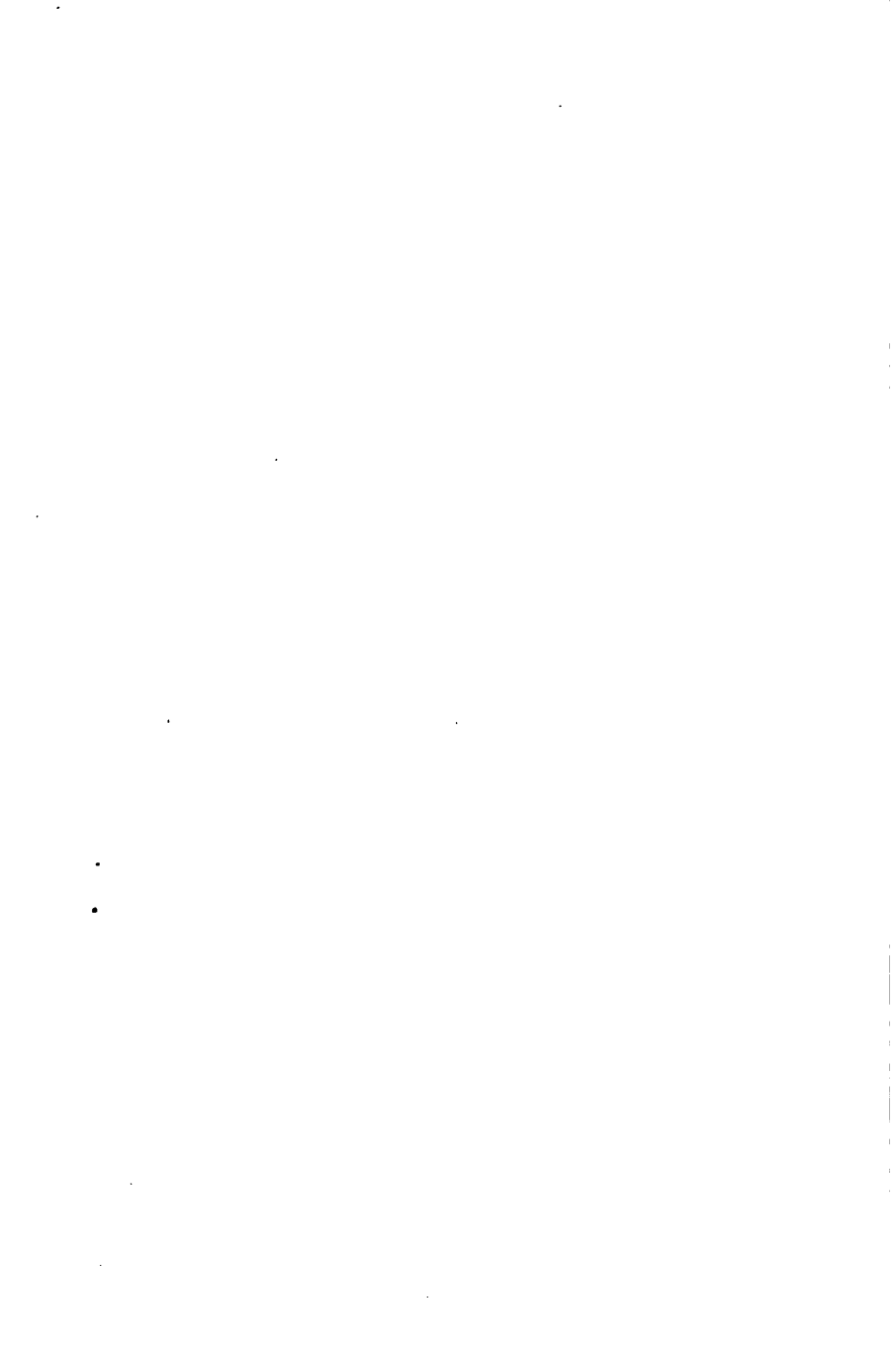
‘Judith!’ he said again, in a tone of the deepest anxiety. ‘I am here; speak to me.’

But the eyes still stared fixedly, and the lips made no movement. He had kept his tryst with a dead woman.

THE END.

S. & H.

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